

Broken: 7 Ungodly “Christian” Rules

Introduction to the course

A. The course contents

1. What’s the Problem? (pp. 9-22)
698 - Seek where You May to Find a Way
2. Following Your Liver (pp. 23-50)
559 – If Your Beloved Son, O God
3. Discipline for the Soul (pp. 51-76)
558 – Salvation unto Us Has Come
4. Reasoning Oneself to Hell (pp. 77-108)
797 – I Know My Faith is Founded
5. Get It Now in Abundance (pp. 109-146)
CW444 – If You But Trust in God to Guide You
6. Repeat, Iterate, Do Over (pp. 147-186)
861 – Lord Jesus Christ, the Church’s Head
7. Unruly Rules (pp. 187-226)
717 – What is the World to Me
8. Self-Justification (pp. 227-258)
TLH 373 – By Grace I’m Saved, Grace Free and Boundless
9. And So (pp. 259-277)
557 – Dear Christians, One and All, Rejoice

B. What we will try to learn

1. The problem with rules
2. How rules deceive us
3. How rules enslave us
4. Avoiding building a yellow brick road to hell

C. How to prepare for each session

1. Read the chapter from the book.
2. Answer the questions on the question sheet.
3. Consider the issues that are being raised by the readings.

1. What's the Problem?

1. What are posers?
2. What was Punk Rock John's problem?
3. What are the "dirty crow" tricks?
4. Why are active churches becoming famished?
5. What is Postmodernism?
6. What is meant by "the golden cow's new clothes"?
7. Why did Paul imply that the Galatians were foolish?
8. Why is the second stanza of A Mighty Fortress relevant to this course?

2. Following Your Liver

1. What is the devil's first rule?
2. What was Emo Dan looking for?
3. What is Mysticism?
4. Why is Mysticism the road to nowhere?
5. Why does Mysticism discount the Bible?
6. To what does Mysticism invariably lead?
7. What did Luther call Mysticism? Why?
8. Why are our feelings an unreliable guide to spiritual truth?

3. Discipline for the Soul

1. What is the inherent problem with even good rules?
2. What is the essence of Morality?
3. When is Morality good and useful?
4. Why does Morality often introduce a “sliding scale”?
5. What is the “placebo defect”?
6. What is the *opinio legis*?
7. What does the phrase “Moralism gives us a false mirror” mean?
8. Why does Moralism lead Christians down the wrong path?

4. Reasoning Oneself to Hell

1. What is Rationalism?
2. What was the Enlightenment?
3. What is Modernism? Explain the role of education.
4. How did Romanticism and Postmodernism challenge Modernism?
5. What is Pragmatism?
6. Why is Pragmatism dangerous to the Christian faith?
7. How does Rationalism attack the Scriptures?
8. What is “Gospel reductionism”?

5. Get it Now in Abundance

1. What lesson can modern humans learn from Ozymandias?
2. What does the phrase “you only go around once” mean?
3. What does *Sitz im Leben* mean?
4. Why is Prosperity dancing with the devil?
5. What is the church growth movement?
6. Why do “new measures” in the church always fail?
7. What is the true worship of God?
8. What are the theology of glory and the theology of the cross?

6. Repeat, Iterate, Do Over

1. What was Tiger's real problem?
2. What is churchology?
3. What is the problem with IfWeCanJust?
4. Why have the many efforts to restore the church failed so badly?
5. What is history of the idolatry of structure?
6. How does the idolatry of worship trouble us today?
7. Why is the search for the "perfect" church dangerous?
8. How has the "church" become the enemy of the "Church"?

7. Unruly Rules

1. What is the biblical definition of sin?
2. Why are we addicted to sin?
3. How do people turn “God” and “Jesus” into idols?
4. Why is “Freedom” regarded as the right to believe what one pleases?
5. What is Tradition?
6. How are traditions bad? How are they good?
7. Why can’t people find the true God in Freedom?
8. Why is rebellion against tradition addictive?

8. Self-Justification

1. Why does Satan in *Paradise Lost* appear to be heroic by modern standards?
2. Why are Christians not self-made men and women?
3. What is the “ever-lie”?
4. What is “I-theology”?
5. What is concupiscence?
6. Why does counterfeit Christianity always teach the worship of self?
7. Why is it said that we are saved by a “foreign righteousness”?
8. Why is justification said to be “judicial”?

9. And So

1. What will be the fate of Punk Rock John?
2. What is wrong with the “60-day free trial of Christ”?
3. Why do human efforts to build the church often kill it instead?
4. Why can we use the words “doctrine” and “teachings” synonymously?
5. How do we get on the wrong side of God’s justice?
6. What is the truth about our salvation?
7. Do you understand the nature of the problem presented in this course?
8. Do you understand the only solution?

Broken: 7 Ungodly “Christian” Rules

1. What’s the Problem?

I. What is the purpose in this class?

A. People get lost. How does this happen?

1. They do not trust God.
 - a. Eve was placed in a paradise, but Satan convinced her that God was not trustworthy and was holding something back from her. She bit literally and figuratively.
 - b. “When the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was appealing to the eyes, and that the tree was desirable to make one wise, she took some of its fruit and ate. She gave some also to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it.” Genesis 3:6
2. They do not obey God.
 - a. God told the people after the flood to disperse and fill the earth. That did not seem to be the best strategy to them, so they tried to build a tower at Babel.
 - b. “They said, ‘Come, let’s build a city for ourselves and a tower whose top reaches to the sky, and let’s make a name for ourselves, so that we will not be scattered abroad over the face of the whole earth.’” Genesis 11:4
3. They close their eyes to evil.
 - a. Given his choice by Abraham of where to live in the land, Lot chose the rich plain of the Jordan but refused to avoid the evil inhabitants of the city of Sodom.
 - b. “Now the men of Sodom were extremely wicked sinners against the LORD.” Genesis 12:13...“Because he had been living in Sodom, they [enemy kings] took also Lot, the son of Abram’s brother, and his possessions and went on their way.” Genesis 14:12
4. They look only at the present.
 - a. Esau had the right of the firstborn, being a few minutes older than his brother Jacob. He was willing to trade this valuable possession to fill his empty stomach just once.
 - b. “Jacob said, ‘First, sell me your right as the firstborn.’ Esau said, ‘Look, I am about to die. What good is the birthright to me?’” Genesis 25:31,32
5. They defy God.
 - a. The Egyptian king Pharaoh was interested in building his nation by any means that were available, including enslaving other people. He was not interested in hearing that God might be displeased with his preoccupation.
 - b. “Pharaoh said, ‘Who is the LORD that I should listen to his voice and let Israel go? I do not know the LORD, and I certainly will not let Israel go.’” Exodus 5:2

B. Lost people become desperate.

1. They take things into their own hands.
 - a. Saul was king of Israel, and he was being attacked by the Philistines, his continual nemesis. His troops were scattering, Samuel had not yet come to advise him, and he felt he had to do something to force God to help him. He offered a sacrifice illegally.
 - b. "So Saul said, 'Bring me the burnt offering and the fellowship offering.' He then presented the burnt offering." 1 Samuel 13:9
2. They look for help in the wrong places.
 - a. Faced with a superpower to the north, the kings of Judah looked for human help from another powerful country rather than help from the LORD.
 - b. "Woe to those who go down to Egypt, without consulting me. They seek Pharaoh's protection, and they take refuge in the shade of Egypt!" Isaiah 30:2
3. They rely on their own strength.
 - a. Peter loved the Lord Jesus, and he was bold. When Jesus warned him that he would fall into temptation and deny Him, Peter firmly declared he was strong enough to resist such a temptation.
 - b. "And Peter remembered the word Jesus had spoken, 'Before the rooster crows, you will deny me three times.' And he went outside and wept bitterly." Matthew 26:75
4. They fall into despair.
 - a. Judas had done the inconceivable and betrayed his Lord. Rather than repenting of his heinous sin and seeking forgiveness, he gave up and hung himself.
 - b. "He [Judas] threw the pieces of silver into the temple and left. Then he went out and hanged himself." Matthew 27:5

C. Christian punks are posers.

1. Why are they posers?
 - a. Christian teachings are given by God and cannot change. Christians serve God by conforming their lives to these teachings. Christianity is God's religion.
 - b. At its heart, punk rock is rebellious. Punks want to tell their message of discontent to the world and get the world to see it their way.
 - c. Christian punks use Christian words and ideas, but they adapt their meanings so as to fit with their feelings of rebellion. They deceive themselves by emphasizing emotion.
2. The need for something new
 - a. They believe that they can serve God better if they can just find a new innovation for their music, a new chord, that better expresses their feelings.
 - b. Because their approach is based on their feelings, i.e., emotions, they need to continually strive for better highs.
 - c. They are always feeling limited in their efforts to praise God by the inherent nature of Christianity, and they need to push the limit to sustain "the feeling."

3. The end of reconciliation
 - a. Eventually, they will encounter the “dark side,” the reality of trying to worship God without being grounded in the Word.
 - b. When they are told the ugly truth that their self-chosen means is not compatible with the message that the church teaches, their world falls apart and their bubble bursts.
 - c. Because they are not grounded on the content of the Scriptures, they find that nothing they try will work because it never did. They had just pretended it did.

II. How people are robbed blind.

A. Dirty crow tricks

1. Stealing the Word {Matthew 13:4-7}
 - a. When God’s Word is spread, Satan tries to take it before it can take root. “Some seed fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it.”
 - b. Failing that, Satan tries to limit the amount of good the Word can do. “Other seed fell on rocky ground, where it did not have much soil. Immediately the seed sprang up, because the soil was not deep. But when the sun rose, the seed was scorched. Because it had no root, it withered away.”
 - c. Failing that, Satan tries to raise up other things to overwhelm the Word. “Other seed fell among thorns. The thorns grew up and choked it.”
2. Creating “enthusiasts”
 - a. Religious enthusiasts are people who believe that they can understand God’s will through means other than the Scriptures. Once they accept this idea, they are cut off from the source of spiritual power.
 - b. Satan fosters enthusiasm by appealing to pride and innate ability.
3. Seeking the “deeper meaning”
 - a. “It can’t be this easy!” “I must have to do something!”
 - b. “It can’t be this hard!” “There must be a shortcut to pleasing God!”

B. Famished

1. Looking for something relevant to believe
 - a. When people abandon the Word or raise other materials to the same level, they lose their secure base. They must hunt for something else to sustain them.
 - b. It is only a matter of time before they settle on some set of manmade rules which are idols that cannot help them in the long run.
2. Strung out on postmodernism
 - a. Postmodernism denies absolutes and encourages everyone to develop their own sense of truth. They are advised to become their own source of wisdom.
 - b. People are left with nothing that is sure and certain. They are dancing, but there is no place to sit down when they are tired and need something solid to relate to.

3. Minnows behind glass
 - a. Sturgeons eagerly eat minnows. Put minnows into a tank with a sturgeon, and they will quickly be swallowed. Separate the sturgeon from the minnows by a glass partition, and the sturgeon will crash into the glass partition until it learns that it cannot get the minnows. Remove the glass, and the sturgeon will starve to death, believing the minnows are still inaccessible.
 - b. Although the Bible is readily available, once people believe that it cannot help them, they will die of spiritual starvation with a ready source of spiritual nourishment at hand.

III. Seeking a new view

A. The golden cow's new clothes

1. The emperor's new clothes
 - a. In Hans Christian Andersen's tale, a vain and gullible emperor paid tailors to make him a special set of clothes that only worthy people could see. There were no clothes, but everyone had to play along for fear of being thought to be vulgar.
 - b. In trying to show how "with it" they are, people are easily lured into doing things that are just as foolish as the vain emperor. This trap is damning when it involves developing a more elegant faith in our Savior than comes through the Scriptures.
2. Aaron and the golden calf
 - a. It is hard to believe that with God's pillar of cloud and fire with them and having just promised not to worship any other gods the Israelites could desire an idol to worship, but the willingness to substitute something for God is strong in all of us.
 - b. "All the people pulled off their gold earrings and brought them to Aaron. ⁴He took what they handed him and shaped it with an engraving tool and made it into a bull calf cast out of metal. Then they said, 'This is your god, Israel, which brought you up out of the land of Egypt.'" Exodus 32:3-4
3. A new view of the Scriptures
 - a. "The Scriptures are hard to understand. We need a" People from the illiterate to the theologians will fill in this blank with "new translation," "new approach to interpretation," "more modern view," and numerous other phrases.
 - b. The real goal of these "new views" of Scripture is to make it less God-dominated and more appealing to human reason. Certainly, it is reasoned, "man has learned a lot since God first motivated men to write down their ideas about Him and His will. We should not be prisoners of our primitive past."
4. Pray, work, and hope
 - a. For some, it is a better order of service, a better worship facility, better or different music, more programs, an abler pastor, or something else about the organization.
 - b. For others, it is the emotional or ethical basis of the belief system. It needs to more clearly emphasize prayer, self-improvement, spirit-baptism, etc.

B. All that glitters....

1. Freedom, but from what?
 - a. "Rights" and "freedoms" are the holy grail of American society. Perhaps it might better be put as the "right to do anything I please" and the "freedom from everything I do not like."
 - b. In effect, Americans desire to have their society be custom-made for each one of them individually and then what? It is an impossible dream which will leave those who pursue it grasping nothing tangible.
 - c. Jesus said, "After all, what will it benefit a man if he gains the whole world, but destroys himself or is lost?" Luke 9:25
2. New does not necessarily mean better.
 - a. In a world where the only constant is change, it is easy for people to get caught up in the obsession that change is always good and that old is always inadequate. Yet even in the secular world, there are things that are better not to change (e.g., the gauge on a railroad).
 - b. "For there will come a time when people will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, because they have itching ears, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in line with their own desires. They will also turn their ears away from the truth and will turn aside to myths." 2 Timothy 4:3-4
3. One must study the Scriptures to understand their message.
 - a. God's standard of truth is the Holy Scriptures which he gave through inspiration. It is only from this source that spiritual truth can be found.
 - b. "So then, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message comes through the word of Christ." Romans 10:17
 - c. "Now the Bereans were more noble-minded than the Thessalonians. They received the word very eagerly and examined the Scriptures every day to see if these things were so." Acts 17:11
 - d. "How blessed is the man who does not walk in the advice of the wicked, who does not stand on the path with sinners, and who does not sit in a meeting with mockers. But his delight is in the teaching of the LORD, and on his teaching he meditates day and night." Psalm 1:1-2

698 - Seek where You May to Find a Way

Seek where you may to find a way that leads to your salvation.
My heart is stilled, on Christ I build, he is the one foundation.
His Word is sure, his works endure;
He overthrows all evil foes; though him I more than conquer.

Seek whom you may to be your stay, none can redeem another.
All helpers failed; this man prevailed, the God-man, Christ our brother.
This Servant-Lord our life restored;
We're justified, for he has died, the guiltless for the guilty.

Broken: 7 Ungodly “Christian” Rules

2. Following Your Liver

IV. All about hearts

A. People and their hearts

1. The heart of the matter
 - a. When many ideas have been placed on the table and things are getting hairy, someone is likely to say, “Let’s get to the heart of the matter.” There must be something in the pile of information that will set the direction so that everything will make sense.
 - b. The heart of an issue is the center about which everything else organizes itself. If one cannot find something that fulfills that role, then one is almost certainly facing an unresolvable situation.
2. A matter of the heart
 - a. The heart is regarded in Western civilization as the seat of the emotions, particularly the strong emotions. Love and hate are both matters of the heart.
 - b. Romantic love is especially regarded as a matter of the heart. This means that emotions tend to control the situation, often making people intellectually blind to some of the attributes of the object of their attraction.
3. With all my heart I love....
 - a. Our hearts are thrilled by the things we love, whether that be our favorite ice cream flavor, car model, vacation spot, or sports team.
 - b. Our choices of what we like do not have to be rational or even be made consciously. Our subconscious minds are quite capable of synthesizing choices for us based on unrelated factors and allowing our conscious minds to rationalize why they should be our favorites.
4. My heart isn’t in it.
 - a. While sometimes our hearts drive us to new heights and cause us to follow trails of high adventure and daring accomplishments, this is not always the case. Sometimes we simply cannot rise to the occasion.
 - b. While such lethargy might be caused by mental illness, it is often just a case of our emotional tank running dry. This can happen in our secular life, but it can also happen in our spiritual life. It can be a matter of concern.
5. Heartsick
 - a. Matters can get worse. We can develop an aching in our hearts that paralyzes our ability to handle daily life situations and may lead to an emotional breakdown.
 - b. When our hearts become deeply troubled, we become especially gullible to things which promise a quick and definitive cure. This can be dangerous spiritually.

B. The Bible and the heart

1. The happy heart

- a. It is good for Christians to be happy of heart in the simple things of their daily lives. God desires his children to have such happiness.
- b. King Solomon wrote, "Go ahead, eat your food with joy, and drink your wine with a happy heart, for God is already pleased with what you do." Ecclesiastes 9:7

2. The proud heart

- a. God, however, does not want our hearts to become proud. He has given us everything and every ability that we have, so we have no right to be proud of ourselves or of our achievements.
- b. The Virgin Mary sang, "He [God] has scattered those who were proud in the thoughts of their hearts." Luke 1:51

3. The troubled heart

- a. When things do not go well in our lives, our hearts are tempted to become troubled and our minds to worry because we do not fully place our trust in the LORD. In particular, we can begin to doubt that we can rely on God for our salvation.
- b. Jesus said, "Do not let your heart be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me." John 14:1

4. The doubting heart

- a. But things can become still worse; our hearts can fear that we have sinned so badly that God can never forgive us. At such times we must remember that God the Father has declared us to be righteous in his sight.
- b. "If our hearts condemn us, God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything." 1 John 3:20

5. The evil heart

- a. This revelation of God through the Apostle John is critical to us because, based on our own sinful nature, our hearts do nothing but set us up to commit sins in our thoughts, in our words, and in our actions. We must look to God to justify us because our hearts are prone to the evil of which Satan wants to convict us.
- b. Jesus said, "To be sure, out of the heart come evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, sexual sins, thefts, false testimonies, and blasphemies." Matthew 15:19
- c. The LORD said, "The heart is more deceitful than anything. It is beyond cure. Who can understand it?" Jeremiah 17:9

V. Mysticism

A. The Great Lie

1. The devil's first rule

- a. Satan knows that if people repent and rely completely on Jesus Christ to give them the forgiveness for their sins and the righteousness to stand before God, then they will go to heaven, and he will have lost them. Therefore, the devil must direct their faith away from Jesus.
- b. Since simply telling people that he does not want them to believe in Jesus is likely to have a low success rate, the devil needs to use "The Lie," often carefully concealed, that somehow Jesus is not enough for salvation and that they must add to the revelation of Jesus given in the Scriptures.
- c. Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, told the Sanhedrin, "There is salvation in no one else [besides Jesus], for there is no other name under heaven given to people by which we must be saved" Acts 4:12. Satan does not want people to believe this statement.

2. How "The Lie" works

- a. As Luther said, "Where God builds a church, the devil builds a temple next door." The devil is an expert at creating counterfeit Christianities. These are churches where Jesus is preached, but in such a way as to cause people to believe that they must feel a certain way or need to do something to contribute to their salvation.
- b. "The Lie" tries to get Christians to "feel" rather than to rely completely on the Word of God. This is incredibly easy for Satan to do because people want to have the freedom to choose how much to rely on Jesus and how much to rely on themselves.
- c. It is always about "feelings" because feeling good makes people believe all is well, and they are in God's favor.

3. Letting the sunshine in

- a. To feel good, people need symbols of that feeling. Those who love a sports team feel good when they are wearing the garb of that team. In the same way, people want something that they can believe shows they are on God's team.
- b. They look for favorable signs that have nothing to do with Christianity, such as the sun shining on their faces, the wind at their backs, their religious discipline clearing obstacles from their path, or their general feeling of goodness.

4. "Feel good" religion

- a. The desire for that good feeling about one's religion often starts with pride. Belonging to the right church or a successful church has to mean one is on the road to heaven.
- b. But things could always be better. There could be better programs, a better liturgy, a better facility, or some other mechanical improvement. This can become an obsession.
- c. Then there is self-improvement. Certainly, God wants his people to be more faithful by personally growing in their Christian life. There are always new things to try.
- d. Finally, there needs to be a path to a higher spirituality that one can find to feel even more certain that God is really pleased with one's life and one's commitment.

B. The path from God

1. The road to nowhere

- a. When one is going somewhere, the somewhere actually needs to exist, and one needs to know where the somewhere is. One needs some sort of map to get there. The map can be composed of drawings, of words, or of mental images, but it must reliably lead from here to there.
- b. The mystic pursuit of God has no such map because such a map can only come from God Himself. Jesus made that plain when He said, "I am the Way and the Truth and the Life. No one comes to the Father, except through me." John 14:6
- c. Without such a map, a person must choose his or her own direction, and that direction will be wrong, no matter how right it feels at the time. God has not promised to sanctify what our emotions tell us.
- d. Furthermore, emotions don't last; they change. There is an old Amish saying that "kissin' don't last, cookin' do." The stronger the feeling that a person develops about something, the harder it is to sustain. It is part of the reason that drug addicts need to take bigger and bigger doses or to switch drugs to keep getting the highs they crave.
- e. And then there is rebound. When one can no longer deny to oneself that one's idol has failed to deliver, then strong love turns to strong hate. One has been deceived, and one needs a scapegoat other than oneself upon whom to place the blame.

2. The worship of the emotions

- a. You may be angry, even enraged, when something does not live up to what it promised when it talked sweetly to you to get you to rely on it. But once you become reliant on something, you are hooked. You must find another something to replace the thing that caused such disappointment. Emotion-driven faith requires emotional highs.
- b. In fact, some people become emotional floozies. They feel a high, but they know it will not last forever. They need to hop to the next source of emotional excitement before the current flame can no longer keep them as high as they had hoped. Eventually the repeated highs and sinking feelings wear on them and lead them to despair.

3. Breaking alone

- a. It is not that those seeking God through their emotions are insincere. They are just foolish. They want a relationship that is meaningful but one they can control. It has to feel good, but they need to be able to tell themselves that they are not addicted to what they feel if they find it is not right. Too often they are lying to themselves.
- b. But if they are right, the devil still has not lost them. He has another lie ready for them that sounds even more plausible than the last. They are more experienced, they think, and they are. They are more experienced at being duped. They love the romance, but they find that they cannot live with the husband.
- c. Eventually it all comes crashing down. The despair becomes hip deep and rising. Years of pretending still lead to the grave with no certainty of what is on the other side. How does one feel when one dies? Are there signposts that you have been on the right road? If not, how can one retrace one's steps and still pick another road? As the body grows cold, the way of mysticism leaves one holding the devil's hand.

VI. The haven for the heart

A. The Bible is a book.

1. Books don't change.
 - a. When one pulls an old book off the shelf in a library, it says the same thing it did on the day that it was placed on that shelf. Moreover, after God wrote His Book, He never issued a second edition.
 - b. Emotions are like the grass in the field. Isaiah wrote, "Grass withers, flowers fade, but the Word of our God endures forever." Isaiah 40:8
2. Reading the Book
 - a. The critical factor in reading the Bible is to read verses in their context, not to pick and choose those statements which appeal to our emotions. God's Word is truth, but the devil's picking and choosing from it is not. Everything in the Bible is valuable, but it must be used as it was intended.
 - b. The Bible is the real thing and the complete thing. St. Paul wrote, "All Scripture is God breathed and is useful for teaching, for rebuking, for correcting, and for training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be complete, well equipped for every good work." 2 Timothy 3:16,17

B. The heavenly message

1. The biblical message is certain.
 - a. The message of God does not waffle or leave a person hanging.
 - b. "As surely as God is faithful, our message to you is not 'Yes' and 'No.' For the Son of God, Jesus Christ, who was preached among you by us (by me, Silas, and Timothy), was not 'Yes' and 'No,' but in him the 'Yes' stands firm. In fact, as many promises as God has made, they have always been 'Yes' in him." 2 Corinthians 1:18–20
2. The God behind the message is reliable.
 - a. The God of the Bible promises a lot to His followers, both in this world and in eternity. Moreover, He is fully capable of delivering everything that He has promised.
 - b. The LORD said sarcastically, "Is my arm really too short to redeem? Do I not have enough power to rescue?" Isaiah 50:2
3. It is the only message that matters.
 - a. Everything we see around us is defective. Things wear out, ideas come but do not fulfill their promise, friends die, and things we clung to fervently must be abandoned. Only the message of the LORD in His Word remains unchanged and is still what it promises.
 - b. Jesus said, "Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away." Matthew 24:35

559 – If Your Beloved Son, O God

If your beloved Son, O God, had not to earth descended
And in our mortal flesh and blood had not sin's power ended,
Then this poor, wretched soul of mine in hell eternally would pine
Because of my transgression.

But now I find sweet peace and rest; despair no more reigns o'er me.
No more am I by sin oppressed, for Christ has borne sin for me.
Upon the cross for me he died that, reconciled, I might abide
With you, my God, forever.

I trust in him with all my heart; now all my sorrow ceases.
His words abiding peace impart; his blood from guilt releases.
Free grace thro' him I now obtain; he washes me from every stain,
And pure I stand before him.

Broken: 7 Ungodly “Christian” Rules

3. Discipline for the Soul

VII. The nature of man

A. Height of perfection

1. Planned from eternity
 - a. The LORD said to Job, “Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? Tell me, if you understand anything about it. Who determined its dimensions? I am sure you know. Who stretched out the surveying line over it?” Job 38:4,5
 - b. Even before God created the first human, He knew how He would create mankind and how He would deal with it. Jesus said, “Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.’” Matthew 25:34
2. Created in time
 - a. “God said, ‘Let us make man in our image, according to our likeness, and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the sky, and over the livestock, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that crawls on the earth.’ God created the man in his own image. In the image of God he created him. Male and female he created them.” Genesis 1:26,27
 - b. God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good. There was evening and there was morning—the sixth day.” Genesis 1:31

B. The abyss of sin

1. The fall
 - a. The fall of Adam and Eve changed their hearts. They could no longer please God or even each other.
 - b. “The eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized that they were naked. They sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for their waists.” Genesis 3:7
2. The corruption
 - a. The fall into sin caused mankind to become totally corrupt in every way, and that corruption spilled over into the rest of God’s creation.
 - b. “In the sight of God the earth was morally corrupt, and the earth was filled with violence. God looked at the earth and saw that it was corrupt, for all flesh was corrupt in all their ways on the earth.” Genesis 6:11,12
3. Original sin
 - a. Because of Adam’s sin, all his descendants effectively have a “sin” gene.
 - b. So then, just as sin entered the world through one man and death through sin, so also death spread to all people because all sinned.” Romans 5:12

C. The thinking process

1. Our conscious mind
 - a. We are aware of ourselves. We reason. We learn. We make decisions. Due to all of this, we assume our conscious mind (what psychologists call our “System II”) controls all our actions.
 - b. Unfortunately, this is far from true. Our conscious mind thinks serially. It is therefore slow, and it tires easily. It must sleep, and then it is out of the loop. Although it can train and override our subconscious, it takes continual vigilance and energy to do so.
2. Our subconscious mind
 - a. Our subconscious (called “System I”) controls our automatic actions such as breathing and heartbeat. It reacts to threats and is highly scripted so that it can react quickly.
 - b. It evaluates information in parallel. This means it can make fast decisions before the conscious can think through a matter. It even activates the muscles to put its solutions into effect. This is great if a baseball is flying at you, but it can also be a problem.
3. Our long-term memory
 - a. Long-term memory also relies on scripts. It builds them in anticipation of their being needed, placing fillers into the blanks. When the real situation occurs, available details replace the fillers, but missing data will leave the fillers in place as if they were real.
 - b. Every time our long-term memory is accessed, it is refined to be more favorable to us. The modified memories seem quite real, and we would swear to them.

VIII. The internal struggle

A. Discipline

1. Controlling the subconscious
 - a. The subconscious mind is selfishly biased—physically, mentally, and emotionally. It develops scripts that are in its best interest and learns to please the conscious mind as well. It is bigoted and always seeks its own advantage according to its rules. The devil uses this mechanism for his purposes.
 - b. Because our subconscious puts its decisions into action several tenths of a second before our conscious mind can countermand its action, the conscious is often forced to rationalize what we have already done if it was not alert enough to stop it.
2. The role of personal resolve
 - a. Because the subconscious is always being drawn to what it regards as the most favorable path, it is self-centered, a glutton, a bully, lazy, and inconsiderate. This is a person we would not like to put up with, except that it is us.
 - b. The conscious may be determined to master the unruly behavior of the subconscious through personal resolve, that is, by stomping the subconscious down when it misbehaves. Such an intent requires a tremendous amount of emotional energy because of the speed difference in the decision processes, and few people can do it.

- c. Our conscious can try to train our subconscious to behave better. We all do this to try to get our children to act civilized, at least in public. Training can improve the subconscious' behavior, but it is hard work and needs periodic reinforcement. There is a limit to the amount of training the subconscious can absorb.
 - d. The conscious can try to bribe the subconscious, which can work in the short-term. Unfortunately, bribery often involves food or appealing to pride, which will create the long-term problem of how to sustain obedience without continual bribes.
- 3. The role of culture
 - a. Our conscious individually finds controlling our subconscious an impossible task, but our conscious mind can be aided if other people also want to generate a similar change in the behavior of their subconscious. We call this collective action a "culture."
 - b. The rewards and punishments that are a part of a culture can strengthen the conscious and train the subconscious to create better behavior, but the subconscious will still try to cheat if it has an opportunity. Peer pressure can be useful, but only to a point.

B. Moralism

- 1. The better person
 - a. Some degree of discipline is necessary to live among others, so discipline has its place in the lives of people, organizations, and societies.
 - b. Discipline becomes moralism when an inherent merit is attached to the discipline, that is, assigning a moral right to doing an action and a moral wrong to not doing it.
 - c. Satan is eager to tempt us to believe that we are better people if we are more disciplined and can do things others can't or refrain from doing things others can't resist.
 - d. The more things we can do better than others, the higher the opinion we have of ourselves. We give ourselves higher "moralism marks." It is here that moralism shows its ugly side because it can be used to lord it over others or employ guilt motivation.
- 2. The better church
 - a. Better people want to belong to better churches. Certainly, God should bless morally better people more than others, giving them more money to contribute to make their church and functions more beautiful. This kind of thinking can limit mission work.
 - b. Moreover, while a congregation is necessarily made up of sinners, isn't it better for a church if they are "discreet" sinners rather than gross sinners? That way the rest of the people are not made uncomfortable.
- 3. The better society
 - a. Certainly, a community is a better place to live if the people in it are highly moral. If they are law-abiding and if the most law-abiding are continually being honored, then everyone will want to be law-abiding.
 - b. One can enact laws against morally offensive behavior, such as swearing in public or political incorrectness to attain such ends. One can demonstrate one's own moralism by exposing others doing suspicious things and shun people who insist on acting outside the moralistic norm. Wouldn't this produce a godlier society?

C. The unclimbable hill

1. Spiritual improvement
 - a. It is possible to improve one's body and mind through training and education, but the ability to improve is limited by the time available and by how much can be retained through continual training. Moreover, the gains will eventually be lost due to aging and non-use.
 - b. Spiritual improvement suffers from the same problem. Even the best program can only accomplish so much. One will be left far from perfect.
2. But are you a better person?
 - a. To be a better person one must be able to not only reach one's moral goals, but one must maintain them and keep improving. One cannot negotiate with God on how good one needs to be. God does not grade on a curve; His standard is perfection.
 - b. Jesus said, "So then, be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect." Matthew 5:48
3. Rationalizing
 - a. Working to become the best person possible is bound to generate pride or frustration—pride if we think we are getting close and frustration if we are not doing as well as we hoped. We can always switch approaches, but that just postpones frustration.
 - b. With either pride or frustration, we will eventually begin to rationalize our performance. We will tell ourselves we are closer to perfection than we are or that our failures are not our fault.
4. Bribing the subconscious
 - a. When our conscious minds realize we are falling short, the devil has a ready answer—bribe the subconscious. The subconscious is hardwired into the body's neural network. Neurons get pleasure from chemicals, either by the taking of drugs or through exhilarating experiences. Drugs, legal or illegal, can make one feel more successful, but it is only an illusion. The same is true of our experiences.
 - b. The easiest bribe of the subconscious is to decrease the requirements of our regimen without admitting it. Our conscious tells our subconscious that we will keep at it, just not as hard for a little while.
5. Deceiving others
 - a. Our standing as superior moralists will suffer if people discover that we have cut back or fallen into some sort of misdeed. The appearance of dedication to the moral program must be maintained at all costs.
 - b. In the end, people are forced to accept the immorality of being a hypocrite to their moral pretense or they must abandon it altogether and despair of becoming perfect before God and their fellowmen.

IX. The way of salvation

A. Complete reliance on Christ

1. He has paid the price.
 - a. By taking on Himself and expiating the guilt of all our sins, Jesus has gained for us a complete remission of our sins. We no longer need to fear God's judgment.
 - b. "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." 1 John 1:9
2. He has won the victory.
 - a. Neither do we have to fear death because Jesus arose from the grave gloried; therefore, we who believe in Him will also rise from death with glorious bodies.
 - b. "Death, where is your sting? Grave, where is your victory? The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ!" 1 Corinthians 15:55-57
3. Only He can give us what we need.
 - a. We need perfect righteousness to stand before God. Only Jesus could earn that righteousness through a perfect life and bestow it on us.
 - b. "This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all and over all who believe." Romans 3:22

B. Staying on the path

1. Being in the Word
 - a. We cannot stay in the faith without the work of the Holy Spirit, and He works through the Word. We need to continually read and study the Scriptures so that the Holy Spirit will have the building materials He needs to work on our hearts.
 - b. "Your words are a lamp for my feet and a light for my path." Psalm 119:105
2. Forgiving ourselves
 - a. Because we hate to fail, we find it hard to put failures behind us, but try to rationalize them, thereby giving Satan a way to attack our faithfulness to God. Repentance and forgiveness eliminate the need for us to perfect ourselves.
 - b. "If our hearts condemn us, God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything." 1 John 3:20
3. Rising again after a fall
 - a. The work of the church must continue, and we must do it. If we fail in our personal lives or in the work of the church, then we must repent and rejoin the fray. We must rise, not out of pride, but because we have been called to serve.
 - b. "We must go through many troubles on our way to the kingdom of God." Acts 14:22

558 – Salvation unto Us Has Come

Salvation unto us has come by God's free grace and favor,
Good works cannot avert our doom, they help and save us never.
Faith looks to Jesus Christ alone, who did for all our sins atone;
He is our one Redeemer.

It is a false, misleading dream that God his law has given
That sinners can themselves redeem and by their works gain heaven.
The law is but a mirror bright to bring the inbred sin to light
That lurks within our nature.

Yet as the law must be fulfilled or we must die despairing,
Christ came and has God's anger stilled, our human nature sharing.
He has for us the law obeyed and thus the Father's vengeance stayed
Which over us impended.

Broken: 7 Ungodly “Christian” Rules

4. Reasoning Oneself to Hell

X. The types of reasoning

A. Deductive reasoning

1. What is it?
 - a. A domain is completely defined which contains objects, operators, and rules.
 - b. The positive integers constitute a domain, and addition is an operator in that domain.
2. How does it work?
 - a. A domain is “closed” to the actions of the operators. If two positive integers are added, a positive integer will be the result.
 - b. Operators always work the same way, no matter who uses them.
 - c. One cannot establish new truths with deductive reasoning because everything that can be concluded by applying the operators is inherent from the definitions of the domain.

B. Inductive reasoning

1. What is it?
 - a. A domain is selected and circumscribed by a definition, but all the objects, operators, and rules within the domain are not inherent in the definition.
 - b. The island of Hawaii can be selected as a domain, but not everything is known about it. Investigation and experimentation are therefore necessary to draw conclusions.
2. How does it work?
 - a. A domain is not “closed” to the actions of the operators because things can be learned about Hawaii that were not imagined when it was selected as a domain.
 - b. Operators, such as doing core-sampling of rock layers, may be invented after the domain is selected and yet can be applied within the domain.
 - c. These operators allow new truths to be learned, such as perhaps a large cavern existing under part of the island. “Truth” can even change if new evidence is found.
 - d. Limiting assumptions, e.g., where one collects one’s evidence on the island, frequently need to be made to prevent being overwhelmed with information, and these may affect the “truth” one discovers.

C. Philosophical reasoning

1. What is it?
 - a. A proposition is created by *a priori* assertion, that is, by claiming something is a self-evident truth, e.g., “All men are created equal.”
 - b. A domain is then defined in which it is “reasonable” for the proposition to be true.

2. How does it work?
 - a. Often an effort is made to match the domain to some aspect of the real world.
 - b. Based on the proposition and the domain in which the proposition is claimed to be true, additional propositions may be developed that appear to logically follow.

XII. The use of reason

A. Rationalism

1. The superior mind
 - a. Rationalism is based on the belief that everything in nature has a reasonable explanation. If one merely gathers the evidence, one can determine how the physical world works.
 - b. It further claims that the human mind is capable of understanding the evidence gathered and analyzing it to develop the correct explanation of why things happen as they do.
2. The problem with the evidence
 - a. Before gathering evidence, one needs to define what constitutes evidence, the rules governing its collection, and the population for which it will be collected.
 - b. The evidence must be representative of the population being studied, i.e., no cherry-picking.
 - c. There must be methods to validate the quality of the technique by which evidence is gathered and the thoroughness of this collection.
 - d. The quality of the evidence is dependent on the capability of the measuring devices and methods. Newer instruments and methods may render old evidence obsolete.
3. The problem with the mind
 - a. The human mind has an inherent belief that nature is deterministic, and we can predict the future based on our knowledge of the past and the present. This is not always true.
 - b. The conscious mind is prone to try to explain away inconsistencies in evidence because it believes consistency must exist.
 - c. The conscious mind judges more favorably evidence that confirms its propositions than that which undermines them (called “confirmation bias”). This can even affect how and where evidence is gathered.
 - d. The human mind can feel confined (i.e., trapped) by the evidence and seek a way to avoid being forced to a different conclusion than it hopes for.

B. Pragmatism

1. The compromise with mysticism
 - a. The conclusions of Rationalism can be harsh, and many people want to find a way to soften them. The way is called Pragmatism.
 - b. Pragmatism is willing to accept emotional factors in making its decisions to get the greatest possible buy-in, including non-physical forces at work in nature.

2. The compromise with reality
 - a. In the real world, the answers of laboratory science do not always work. The real equations are too complex to solve in closed form, and all the factors may not be known. This has led to chaos theory to provide explanations of natural phenomena.
 - b. Though a particular policy ignores scientific evidence, pragmatism often supports it as the appropriate solution to a problem for political reasons, even when it cannot work.
 3. The compromise with morality
 - a. Pragmatism is often forced to overstate its case (i.e., tell a “white lie”) concerning some issue to get the support it needs.
 - b. When a reasonable solution directly contradicts one of God’s commandments, people often resort to claiming that “God will understand.”
 - c. People will even pretend that something is “scientifically valid” when that claim is completely ludicrous, if they can rationalize that the claim is in their best interest.
- C. Seeking God by reason
1. Proofs for the existence of God
 - a. There has been a long history of seeking ways to prove the existence of a god through logical arguments. Pragmatically, the existence of a god gives people a sense of security in the face of the enormous power and uncertainty of the forces of nature.
 - b. The cosmological argument for the existence of a god has several forms, but basically all state that because the universe exists, it must have had a beginning, and that beginning must have been the result of the actions of a divine being.
 - c. The teleological argument claims that the universe is too complex to have evolved, so there must be a creator god who designed and fashioned it.
 - d. The moralistic argument declares that man is driven by an internal force to behave morally but that the animals are not. Morality therefore is not an inherent property of life and must have been instilled by a divine being.
 - e. These and other “proofs” for God fail because they attempt to use evidence from the physical universe to establish a truth that is supernatural, that is, not subject to the laws of nature. However, because the existence of a supernatural realm is an assumption that cannot be proven from evidence in the natural realm, the efforts to prove the existence of God are not based on first principles, only on assumptions.
 2. Denial of the existence of God
 - a. Denying the existence of a divine being is usually based on some sort of claim concerning the large amount of injustice in the world which, it is asserted, a rational God would certainly use his power to prevent.
 - b. On the other hand, it is sometimes argued that the universe is too big and complex to have been created and managed by any being, even one with supernatural powers.
 - c. The arguments against the existence of a divine being fail for the same reason the arguments supporting the existence of a god fail. One cannot constrain something in an assumed supernatural environment by evidence from the physical world.

3. Defining a rational God

- a. The conscious mind desires a god with the same degree of reasonability that it possesses. It believes that human rationality is the height of wisdom, and therefore “God” must have the same type of rationality as we do.
- b. Moreover, God must think like we think. He/she/it must be logical when we are logical, pragmatic when we are pragmatic, and understanding when we are driven by emotions.
- c. Finally, because people can learn and become better at doing things, God must be able to learn and become better at doing things. He therefore cannot be confined to what people wrote about him long ago in a book.

XII. The way of faith

A. The Lord is not “reasonable.”

1. The thoughts of God are beyond us.

- a. It is arrogant for humanity to assume that people can think on the same level as God. Imagine a typical five-year-old child giving advice to a grandmaster in chess about which move to make next. Even if the child knew the types of moves possible, it does not mean she could grasp the gestalt of the chess position in her mind.
- b. David wrote, “Many are the wonders you have done, O LORD my God. No one can explain to you all your thoughts for us. If I try to speak and tell about them, they are too many to count.” Psalm 40:5

2. We cannot corner God by reason.

- a. Generals often try to turn the flank of their enemy and force it to retreat. We are not able to outflank God on some issue by outthinking Him and gaining a strategic advantage. His thoughts are too numerous to bound.
- b. David wrote, “Your thoughts to me are so precious, O God! How great is the sum of them! If I would count them, they would outnumber the grains of sand.” Psalm 139:17,18

3. He does not ask our advice.

- a. The LORD is never in doubt as to what to do. There is no way for us to anticipate Him and force Him to stop and ask if we have a better idea. Our rational arguments are without effect on Him.
- b. “For the LORD of Armies has made plans, and who can stop him? His hand is stretched out, and who can turn it back?” Isaiah 14:27

B. The Word they still must let remain.

1. The Scriptures have an enduring purpose which we cannot reason away.

- a. God has already given us the clear path to form a relationship with Him.
- b. “Whatever was written in the past was written for our instruction, so that, through patient endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures, we would have hope.” Romans 15:4

2. Human efforts cannot find God.
 - a. A person's own path, whether it follows fair means or foul, will not lead him or her to a blessed end. All those who seek God in another way than through His Word are "wicked," "sinners," and "mockers."
 - b. A psalmist wrote, "How blessed is the man who does not walk in the advice of the wicked, who does not stand on the path with sinners, and who does not sit in a meeting with mockers. But his delight is in the teaching of the LORD, and on his teaching he meditates day and night." Psalm 1:1-2
 3. The pit of ignorance
 - a. Without the Holy Spirit everyone is blind. It is therefore foolish to believe that some thinker can reason his way to spiritual truth.
 - b. Paul wrote, "The god of this age has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from clearly seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is God's image." 2 Corinthians 4:4
 - c. Jesus said, "If the blind are guiding the blind, both will fall into a pit." Matthew 15:14
- C. A very unequal contest
1. Can man judge God's works?
 - a. It is common in a debate for one party to try to undermine an opponent's credibility to gain an advantage in the eyes of the audience. It is folly to try that tactic on the almighty God.
 - b. "Woe to anyone who argues against the potter who formed him. He is just a potsherd among the broken pieces of pottery on the ground. Does clay say to its potter, 'What are you making? Your work looks like something made by a potter with no hands?'" Isaiah 45:9
 2. Who will dare to teach the LORD?
 - a. How wise does a person have to be in his own eyes to be a complete fool? What will the clever thinker discover that the LORD has somehow overlooked? Can man really reason his way to God?
 - b. "Where is the wise man? Where is the expert in the Jewish law? Where is the probing thinker of the present age? Has God not shown that the wisdom of this world is foolish? Indeed, since the world through its wisdom did not know God, God in his wisdom decided to save those who believe, through the foolishness of the preached message." 1 Corinthians 1:20,21
 3. Recognizing the all-powerful and unboundable LORD
 - a. Without our reasoning the LORD gives us the comfort and security we seek.
 - b. The LORD said, "Be still, and know that I am God. I will be exalted among the nations. I will be exalted on the earth." Psalm 46:10

797 – I Know My Faith is Founded

I know my faith is founded on Jesus Christ, my God and Lord;
And this my faith confessing, unmoved I stand upon his Word.
Our reason cannot fathom the truth of God profound;
Who trusts in worldly wisdom relies on shifting ground.
God's Word is all-sufficient and makes divinely sure,
And trusting in its wisdom, my faith shall rest secure.

Increase my faith, dear Savior, for Satan seeks by night and day
To rob me of this treasure and take my hope of bliss away.
But, Lord, with you beside me I shall be undismayed;
And led by your good Spirit, I shall be unafraid.
Abide with me, O Savior, a firmer faith bestow;
Then I shall bid defiance to ev'ry evil foe.

Broken: 7 Ungodly “Christian” Rules

5. Get it Now in Abundance

XIII. Prosperity

A. The American dream

1. Survival

- a. Historically, the average person did not live long. Diseases, accidents, and hostile acts caused the deaths of many people in childhood and early adulthood.
- b. People therefore regarded the struggle to survive as the most important thing in their lives. Being prepared to face eternity was a close second because death could occur with little notice.

2. Opportunity

- a. As the political environments improved and their health care became better, people's primary concern changed to seeking ways to make their lives more comfortable.
- b. People began to move to find places where there were more opportunities for making more money and for giving their children a chance at a better life than they had.

3. Success

- a. As time passed, better was not good enough. The goal became not just a little more each year, but major steps up the economic ladder.
- b. Showy success became necessary for people to face their friends and relatives, with everyone interested in where so-and-so was going to college and with what corporation she had obtained a position.
- c. People no longer rejoiced when someone succeeded; they envied those who had and plotted how they could do even better. Success has become competitive and all-consuming. It has become a god, and worshipping it has become the national religion.

B. The charm of success is deceptive and fades.

1. Statues in the desert

- a. If one travels the Middle East, one can find many artifacts from centuries and millennia ago. These were made by people to improve their lives and show their social status.
- b. No matter how beautiful and useful the objects of the past were, few of them have any value today. The top-of-the-line telephone from 100 years ago is nothing but junk today. Statues of heroes of the past are now torn down as standards of heroism change.

2. Success in life

- a. In every profession and craft, people strive to do the best work possible. They seek to establish new standards of quality that will set the mark for many years. Often their accomplishments are discarded before they get their next promotion or retire.

- b. Athletes who establish world records often see their records eclipsed within a few years. Newer, faster, stronger, or better prepared competitors are making the “old-timers” a distant memory.
 - c. The houses of the rich and famous, often built at tremendous expense, seldom serve their original owners more than a few years before they are sold, remodeled, or repurposed, as their grandness loses its appeal and as their features become common.
- 3. The decay of success
 - a. Even the standards of success fade. The ability to perform complex tasks with great speed and accuracy becomes of little value as automation takes over many tasks.
 - b. Isaiah wrote, “All flesh is grass, and all its beauty is like a wildflower in the countryside. Grass withers, flowers fade, when the breath of the LORD blows on them.... Grass withers, flowers fade, but the Word of our God endures forever.” Isaiah 40:6–8

C. Mammon

- 1. Creature comforts
 - a. Our desires start with the simple things—food, water, shelter, clothing, and safety.
 - b. These things have morphed into an outlandish variety of food ingredients, beverages of numerous sorts, central heating and air conditioning with comfort zones, seasonal wardrobes overflowing our closets, and in-depth home security systems.
- 2. Status
 - a. It is not enough to have things to satisfy our needs, but we crave things with a higher level of quality and fanciness so that we can boast of our possessions.
 - b. Moreover, our status items must not only be immediately recognizable as superior, but they must have extensive features that can be described *ad nauseum* to those we seek to impress.
- 3. The more the merrier
 - a. Need leads to comfort, comfort leads to greed. If having one home is nice, having a summer home in addition is even better, and having two extra homes in different parts of the country can come to feel like a necessity.
 - b. As time passes, having only one or a small set of anything seems to imply that one is impoverished, unable to enjoy the diversity that life has to offer.
- 4. The cost of success
 - a. Time is a zero-sum entity. Even for the wealthy person, there are the same number of minutes in an hour and hours in a day. The time spent at the office needs to come from the time available for God, family, recreation, and sleep. The stronger the push for success in one area, the more compromises one must make with one’s responsibilities in other areas. One can fool one’s fellowmen, but one cannot fool the clock.
 - b. Jesus said, “But God said to him, ‘You fool, this night your soul will be demanded from you. Now who will get what you have prepared?’ That is how it will be for anyone who stores up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God.” Luke 12:20,21

XIV. Prosperity in the church (the theology of glory)

A. Dancing with the devil

1. The message of “America”
 - a. The idea has been cultivated that the American free enterprise system can work for the church. By use of advertising and shaping its message, a church can become much more appealing to its intended market.
 - b. To be successful, a church’s leaders must learn the secrets of the system well. They must anticipate trends and set the pace.
2. Abusing God’s promises
 - a. While the LORD promises us that His message will be successful, he does not promise that it will be successful through our cleverness or by our standards. We need to preach His message, not prance about using our own methodologies.
 - b. While it may appear that following the crowd will lead to “prosperity,” one must ask whether it will be the church or Satan that prospers.

B. The onset of heresy

1. Acclimating to the surrounding culture
 - a. When we enter a mission field, we need to become familiar with the culture in which we are working. We need to state God’s message in a way that will be understood, but we must make certain what is being understood is really the gospel message.
 - b. Paul wrote, “Accordingly, if I do not understand the language, I will be a foreigner to the speaker, and he will be a foreigner to me.” 1 Corinthians 14:11
2. Accommodating the surrounding culture
 - a. There are things in every culture that are not possible for the church to change. Perhaps it is fashion in clothing or the scheduling of sports events. The church needs to tailor its approach to avoid needless confrontations while proclaiming the whole message.
 - b. Paul wrote, “Preach the word. Be ready whether it is convenient or not. Correct, rebuke, and encourage, with all patience and teaching.” 2 Timothy 4:2
3. Assimilating the surrounding culture
 - a. Heresy develops when the characteristics of the culture begin shaping the activities of the church and gradually shaping the message that it is proclaiming. The yeast of culture can over time change both the tone and content of the church’s message.
 - b. Paul wrote, “Do not continue to conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind.” Romans 12:2

C. Church growth

1. Becoming attractive
 - a. People come to where they think the action is. If a church seems to have the “right stuff” to make it happen, then people will come to get what they can.

- b. Form is more important than substance in being attractive. In fact, substance can be a deterrent to attractiveness. Substance requires deeper thinking than many people want.
- 2. Barometers of congregational health
 - a. People have come to measure the health of a church by the number and age of the people who attend and the energy one feels from the worship service.
 - b. A sharp-looking and well-maintained facility and an entertaining preacher also indicate that a church has the community presence to bring in money.
- 3. The need for “new measures”
 - a. The new measures in religion invariably mean a message with less formal doctrine and with more upbeat characteristics that enhance the positive feelings of the worshippers.
 - b. Paul wrote, “For there will come a time when people will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, because they have itching ears, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in line with their own desires. They will also turn their ears away from the truth and will turn aside to myths.” 2 Timothy 4:3,4

D. Praise, liturgy & worship

- 1. The game of words
 - a. A major goal in society is to win the war of spin. People seek to monopolize all the positive words and hang all the negative words on their opponents. The “words” do not even need substance, they merely need to sound appealing or unpleasant.
 - b. Doesn’t “praise” sound upbeat? Doesn’t “liturgy” sound boring? Doesn’t “worship” mean anything someone wants it to mean and that feels good?
- 2. Music without meaning
 - a. Medieval Catholics wrote music to gain merit by making worship intricate.
 - b. Luther and old Lutherans wrote music to teach people biblical doctrines.
 - c. Mainline Protestants wrote music to make worship pious and dignified.
 - d. Arminians have written hymns to glorify God’s work and decision theology.
 - e. Praise musicians write music to sound religious and create energy in worship.
- 3. The changing now
 - a. Unfortunately, things that energize people can quickly become “so last year.” This is good for the music writers and some of the more famous performers. They make more money from changing worship styles. It is also good for those who treat religious music like drugs, always seeking what will give them a new high.
 - b. For the people in the pew, however, whether the change is in praise or in liturgy, it can become so much jumping through hoops. Eventually people grow tired and drop out, either by stopping attending, by switching churches, or by becoming pew potatoes who hope to earn their salvation through endurance.
 - c. Jesus said, “So if they tell you, ‘Look! There he is in the wilderness,’ do not go out there, or ‘Look! Here he is in the inner rooms,’ do not believe it.” Matthew 24:26

XV. Overcoming prosperity

A. The law of prosperity

1. Avoid failure

- a. In America, failures are either quickly buried or put on government subsidy so they never go away. Therefore, the choices are success or shame.
- b. For the local congregations the pressure has become more and more to grow or be denied resources by their national church bodies. Declining churches are headed for closure.

2. Acquire things

- a. Success is seen as contagious. If one can appear successful, one will be successful. Appearing successful means acquiring things and building projects. People want to be at places that have more and better.
- b. Success is also a mindset. In a successful church organization people are upbeat and talk about a rosy future. One can sense it in the atmosphere, through the way people exhibit a can-do attitude.

3. Think and talk externals

- a. The stranglehold that prosperity has on the church is clear from the way people talk about their congregation in terms of what it has and does and not about what it teaches.
- b. Casual discussions of doctrine are rare even in confessional churches.

B. God's measures (the theology of the cross)

1. The sureness of forgiveness

- a. Words like "total depravity," "sin," "Satan," "death," and "hell" must be inculcated so that the meaning of Christ's work can be fully grasped.
- b. The LORD said, "Though your sins are like scarlet, they will be as white as snow." Isaiah 1:18

2. The simplicity of faith

- a. The secret of salvation is that it is simple. It is not about prosperity but humble acceptance by our hearts of what Jesus has done for us. There is no "better" way.
- b. Paul and Silas said, "Believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved, you and your household." Acts 16:31

3. The long road home

- a. The path to our heavenly home is not smooth, it is not easy to travel, and it is not short. It is, however, the road that we must follow, counting on the LORD to sustain us by His Holy Spirit. We must study and pray and speak, and we must also trust that our God is always with us and will aid us in all our needs.
- b. Paul said, "We must go through many troubles on our way to the kingdom of God." Acts 14:22

CW444 – If You But Trust in God to Guide You

If you but trust in God to guide you
And place your confidence in him
He'll give you strength and stand beside you
When days are dreary, dark, and dim.
For those who trust his changeless love
Build on the rock that does not move.

How can these anxious worries aid you,
These never-ceasing moans and sighs?
Will not his wings of mercy shade you
Whenever troubled times arise?
Our cross and trials do but press
The heavier for our bitterness.

Sing, pray, and keep his ways unswerving,
Perform your duties faithfully,
And trust his Word, though undeserving,
You'll find his promise true to be.
God never yet forsook in need
The soul that trusted him indeed.

Broken: 7 Ungodly “Christian” Rules

6. Repeat, Iterate, Do Over

XVI. The church

A. God’s institution

1. God’s people

- a. God took a man (namely Jacob) named “heel-grabber” and changed his name to “one who wrestles with God” (namely Israel). As members of the “New Testament Israel,” we too should wrestle with God through the study of His Word.
- b. Then he said, “Your name will no longer be Jacob, but Israel, because you have fought with God and with men, and you have won.” Genesis 32:28

2. Built on “the Rock”

- a. Jesus said, “On this rock (Peter’s confession of Christ) I will build my church, and the gates of hell will not overpower it.” Matthew 16:18
- b. Paul wrote, “You have been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the Cornerstone. In him the whole building is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord.” Ephesians 2:20,21

3. The church’s commission

- a. Jesus said, “Therefore go and gather disciples from all nations by baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and by teaching them to keep all the instructions I have given you.” Matthew 28:19,20
- b. Jesus said, “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” Acts 1:8

4. Propagated by the Holy Spirit

- a. Paul wrote, “No one can say, “Jesus is Lord,” except by the Holy Spirit.” 1 Corinthians 12:3
- b. Paul wrote, “He [God] saved us—not by righteous works that we did ourselves, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and the renewal by the Holy Spirit.” Titus 3:5

B. Man’s role

1. Preach.

- a. Paul wrote, “God in his wisdom decided to save those who believe, through the foolishness of the preached message.” 1 Corinthians 1:21
- b. Paul wrote, “Preach the word. Be ready whether it is convenient or not. Correct, rebuke, and encourage, with all patience and teaching.” 2 Timothy 4:2

2. Work together with other faithful Christians.
 - a. The church is one body, and it must function as one body. Members must meet together and work together to carry out the Great Commission.
 - b. "Let us not neglect meeting together, as some have the habit of doing." Hebrews 10:25
 - c. Paul wrote, "I planted, Apollos watered, but God was causing the growth." 1 Corinthians 3:6
3. Don't change the message.
 - a. Moses wrote, "Do not add to the word that I am commanding you, and do not subtract from it, so that you keep the commandments of the LORD your God that I am commanding you." Deuteronomy 4:2
 - b. "Son of man, I have appointed you as a watchman for the house of Israel. When you hear a word from my mouth, you must give them a warning from me." Ezekiel 3:17
4. Don't confuse the message and the methods.
 - a. When Martin Luther reformed the liturgy of the church, he made the minimum changes that he could so as not to confuse the people. He removed false teachings and added a sermon and hymns which told of the works of God.
 - b. The Lutheran Reformation concentrated on making clear the teachings of the Scriptures rather than refining the rituals of man.

XVII. If we can just....

A. False views of the church

1. The church is aged.
 - a. The church has been around as long as today's populace can remember, so like anything that has existed since before their era, many people think of the church as part of the establishment and therefore not good.
 - b. The church is old in its ways, like a restaurant that has not been updated since the 1950's. In a new-model-every-year society, the church seems out-of-step.
2. The church is sick.
 - a. The church cannot react quickly and effectively to changes in the world. It is frozen in its liturgical practices and in its organizational processes and politics.
 - b. The church's message does not resonate. It seems repetitive and dull because its leaders do not even use non-controversial techniques that are well-known to generate interest.
3. The church is dying.
 - a. Churches across the Christian spectrum are losing members. Even when there is some growth, it is usually only short term.
 - b. The church is splintering into so many small components that it has lost its effectiveness in American national life and politics. It lacks emotional presence and doesn't seem to care.

B. Human efforts to save the church

1. The need to remodel

- a. The American reaction to something that appears to be old and deteriorating is to tear it down or do a major remodeling of it. America is a can-do society, and there is a belief that, with enough human ingenuity and effort, anything can be fixed.
- b. As is also common in America, there is no consensus about how to fix the church. There are a lot of dreamers who feel that they have the solution, but the vast majority do not understand the nature of the church. They think of it as a human institution rather than a divine institution with a message that is fundamentally irrational.

2. The idol of order

- a. Despite the apparent disorderliness of American society, people have the gut feeling that those things which do work well are the result of good organization. Successful businesses and successful products do not rely on haphazardness; they are well-planned and managed by people who know how to make things happen.
- b. The Christian church has been an organization since the second century. The church has developed various forms of hierarchy to make sure everything is done right. However, a hierarchy invariably becomes more interested in its own perpetuation and growth than the message of the church. Hierarchies have a long history of using coercion rather than biblical means to build their organizations.
- c. In addition to suggested organizational improvements, there are the new programs that are introduced to appeal to the interest of some target group. Even though the group members may have little interest in religion, it is assumed that drawing them in to do their thing and adding a little religion to their activities will make them desire to become new church members or, if old members, keep from dropping out.

3. The idol of worship

- a. The Christian church has long believed that the procedures and props used in worship were essential to pleasing God and therefore necessary for getting his blessing on the church and its members. The Middle Ages developed numerous liturgies that were refined over the years and mindlessly repeated by people who often did not even understand the language in which they were spoken.
- b. New efforts at liturgy, music, and instrumentation can replace old efforts, but they are only “modern” when they are introduced. Within a few years they are “old” and therefore unlikely to be what is needed to reach the latest “hot” target audience. Continual changes irritate the long-time members who see little gain from the changes.

4. The idol of leadership

- a. Charismatic leaders may fill churches, but they don't remove many people from the road to hell. When a person becomes the center of attention instead of the message, then the message that is being proclaimed will not really matter. People will follow the leader but only so long as he or she leads to where they want to go. They will hear only what they want to hear.

- b. The ability to enthrall people will make a leader popular to other organizations as well, which can start a bidding war and the frequent need to seek replacements when one's leader heads for greener pastures. Whole churches and movements have been built on individuals and declined when they were no longer present.
- 5. The "perfect" church
 - a. Everyone has their own image of the perfect church. It may be big or small, be fancy or plain, be liturgical or freewheeling. When the perfection of the church becomes the goal of the members, there will be constant squabbling and factions periodically leaving the church for another church that seems more perfect.
 - b. Most people see the "perfect church" in terms of externals. It is what they see. Moreover, if what they see does not change noticeably, they can fail to realize when the doctrine of the church is slowly and systematically eroded.
 - c. In the same way that a man marries his image of a woman and not the actual woman, people join their image of a church rather than the church itself. Many marriages fail when people realize that their image of their spouse is nothing like their real spouse. Because of this, churches must be very honest in communicating what they are if they do not want their members "divorcing" them based on irreconcilable differences.

XVIII. Exorcising human effort

A. The need to do something

- 1. Forming committees
 - a. People always love to form committees. If they don't have any idea of what to do, they hope the "wisdom of the crowd" will devise a brilliant solution. If they have their own solution to a problem, they want the committee to adopt their ideas to give them more leverage to push them forward.
 - b. Most committees are a waste of time and of donuts because their members do not have a sufficient understanding of the problem or sufficient ambition to make things happen. The larger the committee, the less likely it will produce anything of lasting value.
- 2. Big, new, special
 - a. The old, dull, and ordinary does not have much appeal. It seems to most people that they have been put on earth to accomplish something, and they expect it to be some-thing with pizazz. Therefore, they are willing to weight the evidence in favor of some new idea more heavily than the evidence against it. While the slow, steady action of water eventually wears away a rock, most people would rather dynamite it.
 - b. When churches rely heavily on advertising to attract attention in a community, they need to be able to proclaim some event or program as "new" or "special" to get people's attention. If something is "bigger" and "better" than ever, or if there is the opportunity to be part of a "new beginning," then "joiners" are falsely expected to show up in large numbers.

3. Christian fellowship without Christ
 - a. “It’s a great opportunity for Christian fellowship” is a phrase that most often is applied to events which have nothing to do with “Christianity” except for being held with other church members or in a church facility. The religious component is often nominal.
 - b. The concepts of “Christian” and “pleasant” become even more confused when members are encouraged to invite non-members. The hope that non-members will find gathering with church members so pleasant that they will return to the church again does not mean that they have picked up any of the church’s message.

B. Legitimate church-building activities

1. Personal and family Bible study (“the family altar”)
 - a. Because only the Holy Spirit can cause faith to grow, continual contact with the Word of God is critical, which means it must be a formal and informal part of the Christian home. Other good deeds cannot compare to studying God’s Word.
 - b. Moses said, “These words that I am commanding you today are to be on your heart. Teach them diligently to your children, and speak about them when you sit in your house and when you walk on the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as a sign on your wrists, and they will serve as symbols on your forehead. Write them on the doorposts of your houses and on your gates.” Deuteronomy 6:6–9
2. Content of preaching and teaching
 - a. Worship and Bible classes are not something to be done *pro forma*. These must pull things new and old out of the Scriptures and be presented so that they can be used by the hearers to place the tiles of biblical teachings onto the mural on their wall of faith.
 - b. Jesus said, “God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and in truth.” John 4:24
3. Living our faith
 - a. Following the Golden Rule needs to be automatic for a Christian and, when possible, the Platinum Rule. As often as he or she can, a Christian should try to leave a person happier than when he or she encountered the person. Our behavior is Christ’s best or worst advertisement.
 - b. Jesus said, “In the same way let your light shine in people’s presence, so that they may see your good works and glorify your Father who is in heaven.” Matthew 5:16
4. Talking about our faith
 - a. Give God the glory. Speak of the LORD giving us a good day, our children, etc. Accept compliments but acknowledge that God has given us the ability to act.
 - b. Speak of your faith rather than of your church. If unchurched people are troubled or searching for spiritual stability, encourage them to meet with your pastor. Express confidence that the LORD has things under His control.

861 – Lord Jesus Christ, the Church's Head

Lord Jesus Christ, the Church's head, you are her one foundation;
In you she trusts, before you bows, and waits for your salvation.
Built on this rock secure, your Church shall endure
Though all the world decay and all things pass away.
O hear, oh hear us, Jesus.

Help us to serve you evermore with hearts both pure and lowly;
And may your Word, that light divine, shine on in splendor holy
That we repentance show, in faith ever grow;
The pow'r of sin destroy and evils that annoy.
O make us faithful Christians.

Broken: 7 Ungodly “Christian” Rules

7. Unruly Rules

XIX. Tradition

A. Secular traditions

1. National

- a. National holidays are a unifying tool for a country. Most people are given time off from work, and getting to celebrate is expected of young and old.
- b. People of a country have rituals which everyone learns to follow. For example, we stand when the national anthem is played, and veterans salute the flag.
- c. The LORD said, “You must rise in the presence of gray hair and show respect in the presence of an elder, so that you fear your God.” Leviticus 19:32

2. Family

- a. Traditions build family unity and expectations. These can involve vacation spots and events that happen at a specific time each year or where children go to college.
- b. Joint activities, such as participating in specific sports or eating at specific restaurants, create bonds between family members and help establish their calendars.

3. Personal

- a. Personal traditions allow a person to establish his or her identity within a general framework of acceptable activities. Examples are an exercise routine and knitting.
- b. The type of food a person eats and how it should be properly prepared are examples of personal traditions that might continue throughout life.

B. Religious traditions

1. Worship

- a. People learn to worship God in a particular language, and even if it is not their native tongue, it may still hold particular meaning for them.
- b. A liturgy that endures generation after generation binds the generations together and gives them confidence that God does not change.
- c. Traditional hymns allow people to feel that they are singing in unity with their fellow Christians of past ages.
- d. “Praise the LORD, all you nations. Worship him, every race of people.” Psalm 117:1

2. Family

- a. It is said the family that “prays together, stays together.” Research has shown that a tradition of daily family devotions helps to preserve marriages and keep children in the faith.
- b. Singing Lutheran hymns together on trips and during certain times of day teaches children the doctrines of the Scriptures and a love of music.

- c. Religious holidays are an excellent time for a family to have traditions that not only bind it together, but also to remind the family members of their Savior.
- d. Solomon said, “Dedicate a child to the way he should go, and even when he becomes old, he will not turn away from it.” Proverbs 22:6

3. Personal

- a. Because the Holy Spirit works solely through the means of grace, a tradition of reading the Bible daily provides the materials for the Holy Spirit to work with and sets a strong example for one’s children.
- b. Personal religious study needs to extend beyond the Bible, however, to take advantage of the work of faithful scholars of the past to understand the message of the Scriptures more thoroughly and to prevent misreading what was first written in another language.
- c. Paul wrote, “That is why there is nothing aimless about the way I run. There is no pummeling of the air in the way I box. Instead I hit my body hard and make it my slave so that, after preaching to others, I myself will not be rejected.” 1 Corinthians 9:26–27
- d. We can do nothing by ourselves. Therefore, taking our problems to our heavenly Father in prayer shows our understanding of what our relationship to God is. We praise Him for His Salvation, pray to Him for our needs, and thank Him for His blessings.

C. Traditions as traps

1. Bad habits

- a. People suffer from undesirable personal traditions that they find hard to break, such as eating too much, spending too much, or being irascible.
- b. Secular organizations also can have bad traditions, such as false advertising, making risky investments, or failing to follow safe manufacturing practices.

2. “My dear, we have always done it this way.”

- a. People sometimes make their lives more difficult by clinging to what once were good practices, but which now only hinder them.
- b. Companies also continue to use practices and make business decisions in ways that do not let them compete with other organizations and serve their customers.

XX. Freedom from

A. The worship of self

1. Foot-loose and fancy-free

- a. It is characteristic of the human mind to not want to be restricted in any manner. With-out curbs to its actions, it will fantasize many scenarios that contain hidden dangers amid their supposed pleasures.
- b. Given effectively unlimited wealth, people are prone to waste that wealth without gaining long-term tangible benefits. Lottery winners and overpaid sports and entertain-ment figures have very poor track records of using their riches productively.

2. Idol addiction
 - a. Freedom is like pain medicine—a little makes life more bearable, but a lot of it causes addiction and the inability to function without increasing doses.
 - b. Like an indecisive squirrel in the middle of the road, freedom often paralyzes people. It gives them too many ill-structured choices. Unable to judge the long-term consequences of particular actions, they opt for the greatest short-term enjoyment. For fear of losing opportunities, time is not taken to evaluate the long-term effects.
 3. Denial of who we are
 - a. With freedom comes the difficulty of establishing personal identity. It is hard to be unique because one needs to make decisions on everything and hold one's ground on all sides. Cultures exist to reduce the stress of choice.
 - b. To have maximum freedom, it is necessary not to become an integral part of any group. This forces people to flee whenever their culture tries to confine them, which leaves them without reference points and permanent kindred spirits.
- B. Dealing with the world outside
1. Creature comforts
 - a. For most people freedom means a certain (often growing) amount of material possessions. Having your own “whatever” means that you never have to borrow it from someone else or do without. This hedging-against-whatever fills storage units.
 - b. Possessions are a barrier against the world interfering with our freedom. So long as we have our own whatever, we can do without things having to get the consent of others. It also bestows the apparent ability to ignore God.
 2. Wage slavery
 - a. To be able to obtain creature comforts requires wealth. If we do not inherit it, then we must exchange some portion of our time and effort with someone who will provide us with the money we need. We must toil for them to get what we want.
 - b. It is, of course, natural for us to want to give as little as possible for what we get. This leads to ongoing labor-management strife and job-hopping.
 3. Chicanery
 - a. Because people desire big gains with little effort, they become gullible to the tactics of those who are willing to ignore the law and honest dealings to part people from their money. This ranges from false advertising to outright swindling.
 - b. Consumers also engage in shady practices from predatory shopping to shoplifting, soothing their consciences with the argument that big business can afford the loss.
 4. Coercion
 - a. This can involve some form of blackmail, where someone is threatened with harm in one area if a concession is not given in another.
 - b. The use of the public treasury by politicians to offer cash subsidies to voters for their votes is a practice which undermines good government on behalf of special interest groups.

5. Medication

- a. When the pressures of the world begin to hem in their freedom, some people seek another realm of freedom by taking drugs illegally or against medical advice. These chemical agents give people the false feeling of a freedom they do not have.
- b. Like all efforts to enhance freedom, drugs are addictive because the better freedom that they appear to offer disappears when their use ceases. They are therefore a trap, not a gateway to an improved life.

6. Mayhem

- a. Some people's idea of freedom is so befuddled that they feel their freedom is continually under attack. They become highly excitable and willing to riot to force others to grant them what they want.
- b. Most people can tolerate only a limited amount of freedom. When freedom in the world exceeds what they can tolerate, they feel they must curtail it by destroying people they believe responsible for the situation.

C. Valley of the Shadow

1. Seeking God

- a. People seek God where they would like to find Him. That may be in pleasure or in hard work or in the inner sanctum of the mind. They may be driven to alter their behavior or what they claim to believe to further their search.
- b. People seek God when they realize they need Him. Until then, they are willing to avoid Him and keep Him out of their lives because He would limit their "freedom."

2. Finding emptiness

- a. We cannot find God in the myriad choices that we attempt to accumulate to enhance our freedom. We can start trying one thing after another in the hope that God will appear and bless us because He knows we need Him, but God is not just a bell cord tug away.
- b. When someone's life has been emptied of God, amazingly there is no God for them to find. One cannot create the certainty of God's presence like one can create a feeling of exhilaration, and if one can, it is not really the one true God.

3. Despair

- a. When one cannot find something that one desperately needs, one panics. It may be a shoe or a car key, but if one needs it to get to a critical meeting, it seems like a matter of life or death.
- b. When it is God who is needed and cannot be found, it may truly be a matter of eternal life and death. When a person does not know enough about Jesus to recognize what He has done for our salvation, then there can be no comfort that matters available for that person.

XXI. Freedom to

A. Serve the LORD

1. Recognize His almighty power
 - a. God said, “I am the LORD; that is my name. I will not give my glory to another, nor my praise to idols.” Isaiah 42:8
 - b. A Psalmist write, “By the word of the LORD the heavens were made. By the breath of his mouth he made the whole army of stars.” Psalm 33:6
2. Do His will
 - a. Jesus said, “So then, be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.” Matthew 5:48
 - b. James wrote, “Be people who do what the word says, not people who only hear it.” James 1:22
3. Rejoice in His salvation
 - a. David wrote, “Bless the LORD, O my soul, and do not forget all his benefits—who pardons all your guilt, who heals all your diseases, who redeems your life from the pit, who crowns you with mercy and compassion, who satisfies your life with goodness, so that your youth is renewed like the eagle.” Psalm 103:2–5
 - b. Paul wrote, “Thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ!” 1 Corinthians 15:57

B. Serve our fellowmen

1. Bear the burdens of others
 - a. Paul wrote, “So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, and especially to those who belong to the household of faith.” Galatians 6:10
 - b. Peter wrote, “Serve one another, each according to the gift he has received, as good stewards of the many forms of God’s grace.” 1 Peter 4:10
2. Don’t judge others by our standards
 - a. Jesus said, “Stop judging, so that you will not be judged. For with whatever standard you judge, you will be judged, and with whatever measure you measure, it will be measured to you.” Matthew 7:1,2
 - b. Paul wrote, “Who are you to pass judgment on someone else’s servant? It is up to his master to decide whether that servant stands or falls.” Romans 14:4
3. Proclaim the Gospel
 - a. Jesus said, “What I tell you in the dark, speak in the daylight; and what you hear whispered in your ear, proclaim from the housetops.” Matthew 10:27
 - b. Paul wrote, “Faith comes from hearing the message, and the message comes through the word of Christ.” Romans 10:17

717 – What is the World to Me

What is the world to me with all its vaunted pleasure
When you and you alone, Lord Jesus, are my treasure!
You only, dearest Lord, my soul's delight shall be;
You are my peace, my rest. What is the world to me!

The world is like a cloud and like a vapor fleeting,
A shadow that declines, swift to its end retreating.
My Jesus shall remain, though all things fade and flee,
My everlasting rock. What is the world to me!

What is the world to me! My Jesus is my treasure,
My life, my health, my wealth, my friend, my love, my pleasure,
My joy, my crown, my all, my bliss eternally.
Once more then I declare: What is the world to me!

Broken: 7 Ungodly “Christian” Rules

8. Self-Justification

XXII. The first commandment

A. The LORD

1. Who is the LORD?
 - a. The LORD is! He never was or will be. He exists in an “eternal now” that is independent of our notion of time and space. “So God replied to Moses, ‘I AM WHO I AM.’” Exodus 3:14
 - b. He claims to be omnipotent. The LORD said, “Indeed, from the first day, I am he. There is no one who can deliver anyone from my hand. I act, and who can reverse it?” Isaiah 43:13
 - c. He demands to be recognized as the Almighty. God said, “I am the LORD; that is my name. I will not give my glory to another, nor my praise to idols.” Isaiah 42:8
2. What has He done?
 - a. Everything that we can see, hear, taste, feel, or measure was brought into existence by God. No one else can say “Mine!” Moses wrote, “In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.” Genesis 1:1
 - b. He has done everything that is according to His will. A psalmist wrote, “In fact, our God is in the heavens. He does everything that pleases him.” Psalm 115:3
 - c. He claims omniscience. “I am the one who announces the final outcome already in the beginning. I announce ahead of time things that have not yet been done. I am the one who says, ‘My plan will stand, and I will do everything I want to do.’” Isaiah 46:10
3. Why is He to be feared?
 - a. The LORD claims the power over all the living, “Now see that I, only I, am he, and there is not a god comparable to me. I put to death and I make alive. I wound and I heal. There is no one who can deliver out of my hand.” Deuteronomy 32:39
 - b. Isaiah wrote, “For the LORD of Armies has made plans, and who can stop him? His hand is stretched out, and who can turn it back?” Isaiah 14:23
 - c. Jesus said, “Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, fear the one who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.” Matthew 10:28

B. The will of the LORD

1. How has He expressed His will?
 - a. He created it in human hearts. Moses wrote, “God created the man in his own image. In the image of God he created him. Male and female he created them.” Genesis 1:27
 - b. He gave it in spoken and written form at Mount Sinai. Nehemiah wrote, “You came down on Mount Sinai and spoke with them from heaven. You gave them upright judgments and true laws, good statutes and commandments.” Nehemiah 9:13

2. What is the nature of His will?
 - a. "The law of the LORD is perfect. It revives the soul. The testimony of the LORD is trustworthy. It gives wisdom to the inexperienced." Psalm 19:7
 - b. "The precepts of the LORD are right. They give joy to the heart. The commandment of the LORD is bright. It gives light to the eyes." Psalm 19:8
 - c. "The fear of the LORD is pure. It stands forever. The just decrees of the LORD are truth. They are altogether righteous." Psalm 19:9
 3. What does the LORD demand of mankind?
 - a. Concerning God's Word, Moses wrote, "These words that I am commanding you today are to be on your heart. Teach them diligently to your children.... Deuteronomy 6:6-9
 - b. Moses further wrote, "Man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD." Deuteronomy 8:3
 - c. Jesus said, "So then, be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect." Matthew 5:48
- C. How do the rest of the commandments relate to the first?
1. The first table
 - a. To obey these three commandments, one must have complete respect for the LORD. Solomon wrote, "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding." Proverbs 9:10
 - b. Jesus wrapped the first three commandments into the sentence, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind." Matthew 22:37
 2. The second table
 - a. David recognized that his sins against his fellowmen were really sins that denied his God. "Against you, you only, have I sinned, and I have done this evil in your eyes. So you are justified when you sentence me. You are blameless when you judge." Psalm 51:4
 - b. Luther started the explanation of all the commandments after the first with the phrase "We should fear and love God...", the essence of the first commandment.

XXIII. Equality with God

A. Gaining a standing before God

1. Showing initiative
 - a. It is a common practice for people to try to impress their bosses by showing initiative. If someone can invent a new product or improve a process, that person often rises in the eyes of the corporate management.
 - b. It is natural, but false, to think that God behaves the same way. God, however, already knows all the best ways to do things, namely His way, and He does not need our help. In fact, such "help" is merely another form of work righteousness.
 - c. The serpent's temptation to Eve (Genesis 3:4,5) was to "take the initiative."

2. Showing commitment
 - a. Bosses like their employees to show up on time and work diligently at the tasks assigned to them. It does not matter whether the employees like the work or approve of the job procedures in use so long as they do what is expected.
 - b. In the work of the LORD, however, attitude matters more than actions. A person must do the LORD's work out of a love for the LORD and not for a reward in the form of status for performing what the LORD expects of us.
 - c. Jesus showed that this does not gain merit before God when He said, "So also you, when you have done all that you were commanded, say, 'We are unworthy servants. We have only done what we were supposed to do.'" Luke 17:10
3. Overcoming obstacles
 - a. The person who becomes a "champion" by beating a bunch of patsies is not regarded as much of a hero. To gain status a person must tackle tasks that are difficult or for which there is a significant chance of failure.
 - b. People likewise try to impress God by looking for difficult tasks in His service to accomplish. People even hope to gain extra standing before God by making common tasks more difficult, as the monks in the Middle Ages did.
 - c. The Pharisees rejoiced in making the service of the LORD as hard as possible. Jesus said, "They tie up heavy loads, burdens that are hard to carry, and place them on people's shoulders." Matthew 23:4

B. Negotiating with God

1. I will do "X" if you will do "Y."
 - a. The purpose of gaining status before someone is to have the access to propose deals. If people can stand before God on their own merit, then they assume that they can propose doing something for Him to get something for themselves.
 - b. The LORD made clear through Asaph that he does not make deals. "I do not need to take a bull from your barn or goats from your pens, because every animal in the forest is mine, the cattle on a thousand mountains." Psalm 50:9,10
2. Substitution for demands
 - a. Many people feel that God is too demanding in His law in their particular case. They therefore offer God a substitute for the obedience that He asks. This is the basis of the indulgence system of the Roman Catholic Church. It is a "pay to sin" system.
 - b. Samuel said to Saul, "To obey is better than sacrifice, and to pay attention is better than the fat of rams." 1 Samuel 15:22
3. Conditional repentance
 - a. Some people are less direct in challenging God, but they still want something for their "willingness" to amend their sinful lives. They condition their trying harder to be obedient on God making their lives better within a timeframe.

- b. This approach is very similar to the seed that fell among the thorns in Jesus' parable. There was joy in Christ so long as God did not allow trouble to come. When such challenges to faith arise, some people quickly abandon their faith. Matthew 13:18-23

4. Ultimatums

- a. Some people are even blunter in their approach to God. They want what they want, and they want it now. They claim God knows that they are entitled to it based on what they have done. Therefore, they let God know if He expects them to believe in Him, then He had better perform.
- b. God cannot be intimidated. He said, "Woe to anyone who argues against the potter who formed him. He is just a potsherd among the broken pieces of pottery on the ground." Isaiah 45:9

C. Moving beyond God

1. Denying original sin

- a. The human heart is prone to adopting the Humanistic view of life, which says that there is nothing inherently in mankind that prevents it from reaching its highest goals. This is like a modern Tower of Babel, built with ingenuity rather than mud bricks.
- b. Without original sin, humanity can hope to move beyond actual sins to a world where everyone can reach their goals in complete harmony.
- c. David stated the LORD's position on this when he said, "Certainly, I was guilty when I was born. I was sinful when my mother conceived me." Psalm 51:5

2. A new morality

- a. Some people see God's morality as presented in the Ten Commandments as an inherent trap that forces people back to the LORD seeking reconciliation. They believe that if a Humanistic morality could be established, then human society could flourish independent of the threats of a deity.
- b. The LORD has no tolerance for such human-defined morality. He said, "Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil, who substitute darkness for light, and light for darkness, who substitute bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter! Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes and clever in their own sight!" Isaiah 5:20,21

3. God doesn't really care

- a. Already philosophers long ago concluded that even if God created the universe at some point in the distant past, He has since lost interest in it, and it is going its own way. Because He has no interest in the physical universe, He certainly has no interest in the souls of the people who live in it. There is therefore no need to fear Him.
- b. Others believe that it really doesn't matter. If there is an afterlife, God will treat everyone one the same because He is loving, or at least He will only punish the really bad people.
- c. God certainly does care. Jesus said, "Are not two sparrows sold for a small coin? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground without the knowledge and consent of your Father. And even the hairs of your head are all numbered." Matthew 10:29,30

XXIV. Only God can justify

A. Righteousnesses that cannot help us.

1. Civil righteousness

- a. God requires it, but it does not save us. Moses wrote, "You shall not use dishonest measurements of weight or volume. Instead you must use an honest scale, honest weights, an honest dry measure, and an honest liquid measure." Leviticus 19:35,36
- b. Jesus said, "Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure pressed down, shaken together, and running over will be poured into your lap." Luke 6:38

2. Human perfection before God

- a. None of us can meet God's standard of perfection. Isaiah wrote, "All of us have become like something unclean, and all our righteous acts are like a filthy cloth. All of us have withered like a leaf, and our guilt carries us away like the wind." Isaiah 64:6
- b. Paul wrote, "For this reason, no one will be declared righteous in his sight by works of the law." Romans 3:20

3. God's own righteousness

- a. God is always and completely righteous. David wrote, "The LORD is righteous in all his ways and merciful toward all that he has made." Psalm 145:17
- b. His righteousness is beyond our comprehension. Moses wrote, "He is a faithful God. He does no wrong. Righteous and upright is he." Deuteronomy 32:4

B. The righteousness God bestows

1. Earned by Christ

- a. Paul wrote, "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus." Romans 3:23,24
- b. "For just as through the disobedience of one man the many became sinners, so also through the obedience of one man the many will become righteous." Romans 5:19

2. The great exchange

- a. Paul wrote, "God made him, who did not know sin, to become sin for us, so that we might become the righteousness of God in him." 2 Corinthians 5:21
- b. "This record stood against us, but he took it away by nailing it to the cross." Colossians 2:14

3. Justified by God through faith

- a. Paul wrote, "For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed by faith, for faith, just as it is written, 'The righteous will live by faith.'" Romans 1:17
- b. "It is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast." Ephesians 2:8,9

TLH 373 – By Grace I'm Saved, Grace Free and Boundless

By grace I'm saved, grace free and boundless;
My soul, believe and doubt it not.
Why waver at this word of promise?
Has Scripture ever falsehood taught?
No; then this word must true remain:
By grace you, too, shall heaven obtain.

By grace! None dare lay claim to merit;
Our works and conduct have no worth.
God in His love sent our Redeemer,
Christ Jesus, to this sinful earth.
His death did for our sins atone,
And we are saved by grace alone.

By grace! This ground of faith is certain;
So long as God is true, it stands.
What saints have penned by inspiration,
What in His Word our God commands,
What our whole faith must rest upon,
Is grace alone, grace in His Son.

Broken: 7 Ungodly “Christian” Rules

9. And So

XXV. The scales of divine justice

A. God’s perfect law

1. Without blemish

- a. The law of God has no imperfections that require human correction. It does not need editing to make it more suitable for modern society.
- b. David wrote, “The law of the LORD is perfect. It revives the soul. The testimony of the LORD is trustworthy. It gives wisdom to the inexperienced. The precepts of the LORD are right. They give joy to the heart. The commandment of the LORD is bright. It gives light to the eyes.” Psalm 19:7,8

2. Unchanging

- a. In fact, God’s law never changes. Why is this surprising? Does the strength of gravity vary on a daily basis, or the sun sometimes rise in the west? If God made His laws for the physical world unchanging, is it surprising He made His moral law unchanging?
- b. Isaiah wrote, “Grass withers, flowers fade, but the Word of our God endures forever.” Isaiah 40:8

3. Absolute

- a. The law of God is as enduring as God Himself. This is because the law is an attribute of God, an essential element of His being. It is part of His image that He implanted into man in Genesis 1.
- b. Jesus said, “Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.” Matthew 24:35

B. Man’s depravity

1. From conception

- a. We have been sinful for our whole existence. We do not know how not to be sinful even if we could desire to stop sinning. We can strive to be less bad, but it still earns us only death.
- b. David wrote, “Certainly, I was guilty when I was born. I was sinful when my mother conceived me.” Psalm 51:5
- c. Paul wrote, “Indeed, I know that good does not live in me, that is, in my sinful flesh. The desire to do good is present with me, but I am not able to carry it out.” Romans 7:18

2. Total

- a. The total depravity of man means there is nothing good in man. This implies that even the idea of making any improvement in the nature of man is a delusion of sin.

- b. Moses wrote, “The LORD saw that the wickedness of mankind was great on the earth, and that all the thoughts and plans they formed in their hearts were only evil every day.” Genesis 6:5

3. Irreversible

- a. A dog is a dog is a dog. Calling it by any other name will not cause it to cease being a dog. There is no way out for man from his sinful maze even if we say there is.
- b. Jesus said, “Whatever is born of the flesh is flesh.” John 3:6
- c. Paul wrote, “Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, and what is perishable is not going to inherit what is imperishable.” 1 Corinthians 15:50

C. The inevitable verdict

1. Guilty as charged

- a. We cannot hide our sins from the LORD. He knows everything that we have ever done or thought of doing. Our sins are all in front of Him, and we cannot deny our guilt.
- b. Isaiah wrote, “All of us have become like something unclean, and all our righteous acts are like a filthy cloth.” Isaiah 64:6
- c. David wrote, “LORD, you have investigated me, and you know. You know when I sit down and when I get up. You understand my thoughts from far off. You keep track of when I travel and when I stay, and you are familiar with all my ways. Before there is a word on my tongue, you, LORD, already know it completely.” Psalm 139:1-4

2. Eternal death

- a. Death was the punishment promised to our first parents if they disobeyed. The LORD said, “You may freely eat from every tree in the garden, but you shall not eat from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, for on the day that you eat from it, you will certainly die.” Genesis 2:16,17
- b. Paul reminded us that God’s judgment has not changed over the years. He wrote, “The wages of sin is death.” Romans 6:23

XXVI. Only by God’s grace

A. The eternal plan

1. Creation

- a. From eternity God planned the creation of the universe. In His foreknowledge He saw every detail of the work before He did any of it.
- b. Moses wrote, “Before the mountains were born, before you gave birth to the earth and the world, from eternity to eternity you are God.” Psalm 90:2

2. Redemption

- a. God also foresaw man’s fall into sin and devised a plan to redeem man before He had created him and before man had committed any sins.

- b. Isaiah wrote, “You, the LORD, are our Father. Our Redeemer from everlasting is your name.” Isaiah 63:16

3. Election

- a. God even chose who would be saved from the billions of people who would at some point live on the earth. He did this strictly out of love and without consideration of the merits of those he chose.
- b. Paul wrote, “He did this (i.e., bless us) when he chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world, so that we would be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ.” Ephesians 1:4–5

B. Its execution in time

1. The promise

- a. After Adam and Eve had sinned and were terrified about their future, the LORD immediately calmed their worst fear by the promise of a Savior who would rescue them from eternal death even if they received the punishment of temporal death.
- b. Moses quoted God as saying to Satan, “I will put hostility between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed. He will crush your head, and you will crush his heel.” Genesis 3:15

2. The Savior

- a. The LORD did not send the Savior immediately but waited until the time He had chosen to bring about His deliverance of mankind.
- b. Paul wrote, “When the set time had fully come, God sent his Son to be born of a woman, so that he would be born under the law, in order to redeem those under the law, so that we would be adopted as sons.” Galatians 4:4,5

3. The church

- a. To spread His saving message, the LORD chose to use those people who already believed the message. He commanded them not to do their own thing, but to proclaim what he had taught them and what was written about him in the Scriptures.
- b. The Savior then launched His church by telling His disciples, “Go and gather disciples from all nations by baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and by teaching them to keep all the instructions I have given you.” Matthew 28:19,20

C. The fulfillment in eternity

1. The day of judgment

- a. God is just, and therefore He must eventually punish those who have not accepted His offer of free salvation. To do this, He will send Jesus to judge all the people who have ever lived on the earth.
- b. Jesus said, “For the Son of Man will come in the glory of his Father together with his angels, and then he will repay everyone according to his actions.” Matthew 16:27

2. The new heavens and earth
 - a. Because man's sin has contaminated the whole world, the LORD will destroy this world and replace it with another in which there will be no sin.
 - b. Paul wrote, "For we know that all of creation is groaning with birth pains right up to the present time. And not only creation, but also we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we eagerly await our adoption as sons, the redemption of our body." Romans 8:22,23
 - c. Peter wrote, "But according to his promise we look forward to new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells." 2 Peter 3:13
3. The joys of eternity
 - a. The full restoration of our fellowship with God and our fellow Christians will be our great joy in eternity.
 - b. John wrote, "There was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people, and language, standing in front of the throne and of the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and with palm branches in their hands. They called out with a loud voice and said: Salvation comes from our God, who sits on the throne, and from the Lamb." Revelation 7:9,10

XXVII. An honest assessment

A. Paths to failure

1. The roads most taken
 - a. Mysticism – Trying to find God in your heart – Emotion
 - b. Moralism – Trying to find God in your hands – Vocation
 - c. Rationalism – Trying to find God in your mind – Reason
 - d. Prosperity – Trying to find God in the world – Material things
 - e. Spirituality – Trying to find God in the church – Religion
 - f. Lawlessness – Trying to find God in His absence – Freedom
2. The folly of man
 - a. Everyone is hard-wired to want control of his or her environment and to be independent of others. Consequently, we are constantly tempted to seek our own pathway to God or at least share the glory with Him for the one He gave us.
 - b. Paul warned us not to seek Christ where we think he ought to be found when he wrote, "Do not say in your heart, 'Who will ascend into heaven?' (that is, to bring Christ down) or 'Who will descend into the abyss?' (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead)." Romans 10:6,7

B. The pathway to God

1. The Word of truth

- a. The book of Psalms begins, "How blessed is the man who does not walk in the advice of the wicked, who does not stand on the path with sinners, and who does not sit in a meeting with mockers. But his delight is in the teaching of the LORD, and on his teaching he meditates day and night." Psalm 1:1,2
- b. Paul wrote, "Indeed, since the world through its wisdom did not know God, God in his wisdom decided to save those who believe, through the foolishness of the preached message." 1 Corinthians 1:21

2. The life of service to the LORD

- a. Good works contribute nothing to our salvation, but they are the Christian's way of life. Paul wrote, "So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, and especially to those who belong to the household of faith." Galatians 6:10
- b. He also wrote, "We are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared in advance so that we would walk in them." Ephesians 2:10

3. The hope of salvation

- a. The LORD's narrow road that leads to salvation is paved with troubles, but we must persevere because we trust in Him. He reassures us through His Word, and we need nothing else to sustain us until we reach our heavenly home.
- b. The Sons of Korah wrote, "Why are you so depressed, O my soul? Why so disturbed within me? Hope in God, for I will again praise him for salvation from his presence." Psalm 42:5
- c. Paul wrote, "We also rejoice confidently in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces patient endurance, and patient endurance produces tested character, and tested character produces hope. And hope will not put us to shame." Romans 5:3-5

557 – Dear Christians, One and All, Rejoice

Dear Christians, one and all, rejoice, with exultation springing,
And, with united heart and voice and holy rapture singing,
Proclaim the wonders God has done,
How his right arm the vict'ry won. How dearly it has cost him!

My own good works availed me naught, no merit they attaining;
My will against God's judgment fought, no hope for me remaining.
My fears increased till sheer despair
Left only death to be my share and hell to be my sentence.

But God beheld my wretched state before the world's foundation,
And, mindful of his mercies great, he planned for my salvation.
A father's heart he turned to me,
Sought my redemption fervently; he gave his dearest treasure.