

Pursue God!

1 Timothy 6:1-12

³ If anyone teaches false doctrines and does not agree to the sound instruction of our Lord Jesus Christ and to godly teaching, ⁴ he is conceited and understands nothing. He has an unhealthy interest in controversies and quarrels about words that result in envy, strife, malicious talk, evil suspicions ⁵ and constant friction between men of corrupt mind, who have been robbed of the truth and who think that godliness is a means to financial gain.

⁶ But godliness with contentment is great gain. ⁷ For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it. ⁸ But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that. ⁹ People who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction. ¹⁰ For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.

¹¹ But you, man of God, flee from all this, and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance and gentleness. ¹² Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called when you made your good confession in the presence of many witnesses. ¹³ In the sight of God, who gives life to everything, and of Christ Jesus, who while testifying before Pontius Pilate made the good confession, I charge you ¹⁴ to keep this command without spot or blame until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ, ¹⁵ which God will bring about in his own time—God, the blessed and only Ruler, the King of kings and Lord of lords, ¹⁶ who alone is immortal and who lives in unapproachable light, whom no one has seen or can see. To him be honor and might forever. Amen. ¹

If we are to become the people God wants us to become we must pursue godliness. But in order to pursue this we must flee from some other things. Three imperatives are upon us:

1. We Must Lay Aside Mind Games

A. The Danger of False Teachers

Romans 1:21 For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened.

B. The Danger of a Religion of the Mind

2 Cor. 10:5 We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.

C. The Necessity of Sound Doctrine

¹All passages quoted from scripture are from *The Holy Bible : New International Version*. 1996, c1984. Grand Rapids: Zondervan.

2. We Must Lay Aside Power Games

1 Tim. 6:4,5 He has an unhealthy interest in controversies and quarrels about words that result in envy, strife, malicious talk, evil suspicions⁵ and constant friction between men of corrupt mind, who have been robbed of the truth and who think that godliness is a means to financial gain.

A. Maturity is Measured by Attitude.

How we see God, how we see ourselves, and how we see one another is at the very heart of relationships.

Philippians 2:3,4 Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves.⁴ Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.

B. Maturity is Gained by Experience

A mental religion does not transform our responses to one another. With all of our commitment to knowledge, insight, and principles, we have great difficulty functioning in the most basic Christian ways. We are easily hurt and hold on to those hurts for so long.

Col. 3:13 Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.

3. We must Lay Aside the Consumer Game

1 Timothy 6:6-8 But godliness with contentment is great gain.⁷ For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it.⁸ But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that.

A. The Abyss of Consumerism

Luke 12:15 Then he said to them, "Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions."

B. Givers and Builders, Not Takers, Users, and Consumers

*Psalm 19:9,10 the fear of the LORD is pure,
enduring forever.
The ordinances of the LORD are sure
and altogether righteous.
They are more precious than gold, than much pure gold;*

Pursue Righteousness!

Two passages grab our attention as we consider the pursuit of righteousness.

1 John 2:29 if you know that he is righteous, you know that everyone who does what is right has been born of him.

Matthew 5:6 Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

1. Exchanged Righteousness

A. What it is Not:

Phil. 3:4-6 although I myself have reasons for such confidence. If anyone else thinks he has reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more: ⁵ circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee; ⁶ as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for legalistic righteousness, faultless.

B. What it Is:

Phil. 3:9-11 and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith. ¹⁰ I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, ¹¹ and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead.

Romans 4:3 What does the Scripture say? “Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.”

2. Passive Righteousness

Romans 1:17 For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, ^a just as it is written: “The righteous will live by faith.”

For the righteousness, ¹⁵ by which a person is worthy of such salvation, of God, by which alone there are righteous people before God, is revealed in it, because formerly it was considered hidden and to consist in a person’s own works. But now it is “revealed,” because no one is righteous unless he believes, as it is written in the last chapter of Mark (16:16): “He who believes,” from faith to faith, as it is written, Hab. 2:4: “The righteous, namely, in the eyes of God, shall live by faith, ¹⁶ that is, only through complete belief in God will he be saved. This is the eternal life of the Spirit.²

²Luther, M. (1999, c1972). *Vol. 25: Luther's works, vol. 25 : Lectures on Romans* (J. J. Pelikan, H. C. Oswald & H. T. Lehmann, Ed.). Luther's Works (Ro 1:17). Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House.

3. Justification by Faith

Justification is the process by which God makes us righteous before Himself. Since God alone possesses righteousness, we can never work ourselves into that state before Him. It must be a gift from Him. Abraham is an example of this”

Romans 4:1,2 What then shall we say that Abraham, our forefather, discovered in this matter? ² If, in fact, Abraham was justified by works, he had something to boast about—but not before God.

Romans 4:4-8 Now when a man works, his wages are not credited to him as a gift, but as an obligation. ⁵ However, to the man who does not work but trusts God who justifies the wicked, his faith is credited as righteousness. ⁶ David says the same thing when he speaks of the blessedness of the man to whom God credits righteousness apart from works: ⁷ “Blessed are they whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. ⁸ Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord will never count against him.”

4. Righteousness is a Gift But it Must Be Affirmed

It is absolutely critical for us to see ourselves as righteous when we have received this gift of righteousness from the Lord. What was given at such great price can never be taken from us. However, because Satan seeks to rob us of our most precious possession, he attacks us continually before God and before ourselves. But notice:

Romans 8:32-34 What, then, shall we say in response to this? If God is for us, who can be against us? ³² He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things? ³³ Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. ³⁴ Who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus, who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us.

Satan would have us look at all of our life from our weakest point, our greatest failure, our deepest sin. God evaluates all of our life from our most responsive place, as we continue to walk before Him with a heart that desires Him and His righteousness.

Pursue Godliness!

1. Knowing God: The Key to Life

To Jesus, knowing God was the key to life.

John 17:3 Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.

Scripture speaks of “knowing” God as the spiritual person’s ideal: namely, the fullness of a faith relationship that brings salvation and eternal life, generating love, hope, obedience, and joy (Ex. 33:13; Jer. 31:34; 8:8–12); Dan. 11:32; John 17:3; Gal. 4:8, 9; Phil. 3:8–11; 2 Tim. 1:12; Heb. 8:8–12). The dimensions of this knowledge are intellectual (knowing the truth about God; Deut. 7:9; Ps. 100:3); volitional (trusting, obeying, and worshiping God); and moral (practicing justice and love; Jer. 22:16; 1 John 4:7–8). Faith’s knowledge focuses on Jesus Christ, the incarnate God and the mediator between God and man. Faith seeks specifically to know Christ and His power (Phil. 3:8–14). The knowledge fostered by God’s covenant agreement with us is reciprocal, with affection on both sides: we know God as ours because He knows us as His (John 10:14; Gal. 4:9; 2 Tim. 2:19)³

The word **know** (ginoskosin) here in the present tense, is often used in the Septuagint and sometimes in the Greek New Testament to describe the intimacy of a sexual relationship (e.g., Gen 4:1, “lay”; Matt. 1:25, “had . . . union”). Thus a person who knows God has an intimate personal relationship with Him. And that relationship is eternal, not temporal. Eternal life is not simply endless existence. Everyone will exist somewhere forever (cf. Matt. 25:46), but the question is, In what condition or in what relationship will they spend eternity?⁴

2. Seeing God: Foundation for Service

Because of God’s infinite holiness and the eternal nature of His life and Person, no one can see His face and live. However, just as God’s mercy was shown to His wayward people Israel, God knows that it is the revelation of His person within our hearts that empowers us for service. Therefore, in mercy he reveals himself to us and we know Him as a result.

3. What Does a Person of God Look Like?

Psalm 1:3-5 He is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither. Whatever he does prospers. ⁴Not so the wicked! They are like chaff that the wind blows away. ⁵Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous.

³*New Geneva study Bible*. 1997, c1995 (electronic ed.). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

⁴Walvoord, J. F. (1983-c1985). *The Bible knowledge commentary : An exposition of the scriptures* (Jn 17:3). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

Pursue Faith!

The More we become like God, the more genuine faith will characterize our lives. The writer of Hebrews tells us that if we desire to please God, faith must be the key ingredient in our relationship with Him.

Hebrews 11:6 And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.

What is faith? *It is made up of three things—knowledge, belief, and trust.*

1. Knowledge comes first.

“How shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard?” I want to be informed of a fact before I can possibly believe it. “Faith cometh by hearing”; we must first hear in order that we may know what is to be believed. “They that know thy name shall put their trust in thee.” A measure of knowledge is essential to faith; hence the importance of getting knowledge. “Incline your ear, and come unto me; hear, and your soul shall live.” Such was the word of the ancient prophet, and it is the word of the gospel still. Search the Scriptures and learn what the Holy Spirit teaches concerning Christ and His salvation. Seek to know God: “For he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.” May the Holy Spirit give you the spirit of knowledge, and of the fear of the Lord! Know the gospel. Know what the good news is, how it talks of free forgiveness and of change of heart, of adoption into the family of God and of countless other blessings. Know especially Christ Jesus the Son of God, the Saviour of men, united to us by His human nature, and yet one with God; and thus able to act as Mediator between God and man, able to lay His hand upon both, and to be the connecting link between the sinner and the Judge of all the earth. Endeavor to know more and more of Christ Jesus. Endeavor especially to know the doctrine of the sacrifice of Christ, for the point upon which saving faith mainly fixes itself is this—“God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them.” Know that Jesus was “made a curse for us, as it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree.” Drink deep of the doctrine of the substitutionary work of Christ; for therein lies the sweetest possible comfort to the guilty sons of men, since the Lord “made him to be sin for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.” Faith begins with knowledge.

2. Belief Comes Next

The mind goes on to *believe* that these things are true. The soul believes that God is and that He hears the cries of sincere hearts; that the gospel is from God; that justification by faith is the grand truth which God has revealed in these last days by His Spirit more clearly than before. Then the heart believes that Jesus is verily and in truth our God and Saviour, the Redeemer of men, the Prophet, Priest, and King of His people. All this is accepted as sure truth, not to be called in question. I pray that you may at once come to this. Get firmly to believe that “the blood of Jesus Christ, God’s dear Son, cleanseth us from all sin”; that His sacrifice is complete and fully accepted of God on man’s behalf, so that he who believes on Jesus is not condemned. Believe these truths as you believe any other statements; for the difference between common faith and saving faith lies mainly in

the subjects upon which it is exercised. Believe the witness of God just as you believe the testimony of your own father or friend. "If we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater."

3. Trust Comes as a Result of Knowledge and Belief

So far you have made an advance toward faith; only one more ingredient is needed to complete it, which is trust. Commit yourself to the merciful God; rest your hope on the gracious gospel; trust your soul on the dying and living Saviour; wash away your sins in the atoning blood; accept His perfect righteousness, and all is well. Trust is the lifeblood of faith; there is no saving faith without it. The Puritans were accustomed to explain faith by the word "recumbency." It meant leaning upon a thing. Lean with all your weight upon Christ. It would be a better illustration still if I said, fall at full length and lie on the Rock of Ages. Cast yourself upon Jesus; rest in Him; commit yourself to Him. That done, you have exercised saving faith. Faith is not a blind thing, for faith begins with knowledge. It is not a speculative thing, for faith believes facts of which it is sure. It is not an unpractical, dreamy thing; for faith trusts, and stakes its destiny on, the truth of revelation. That is one way of describing what faith is.

Let me try again. *Faith is believing that Christ is what He is said to be, and that He will do what He has promised to do, and then to expect this of Him.* The Scriptures speak of Jesus Christ as being God, God in human flesh; as being perfect in His character; as being made a sin offering on our behalf; as bearing our sins in His own body on the tree. The Scripture speaks of Him as having finished transgression, made an end of sin, and brought in everlasting righteousness. The sacred records further tell us that He "rose again from the dead," that He "ever liveth to make intercession for us," that He has gone up into the glory and has taken possession of Heaven on behalf of His people and that He will shortly come again "to judge the world in righteousness, and his people with equity." We are most firmly to believe that it is even so; for this is the testimony of God the Father when He said, "This is my beloved Son; hear ye him." This also is testified by God the Holy Spirit; for the Spirit has borne witness to Christ, both in the inspired Word and by divers miracles, and by His working in the hearts of men. We are to believe this testimony to be true.

Faith also believes that Christ will do what He has promised; that since He has promised to cast out none who come to Him, it is certain that He will not cast us out if we come to Him. Faith believes that since Jesus said, "The water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life," it must be true; and if we get this living Water from Christ, it will abide in us and will well up within us in streams of holy life. Whatever Christ has promised to do, He will do; and we must believe this, so as to look for pardon, justification, preservation, and eternal glory from His hands, according as He has promised them to believers in Him.

Then comes the next necessary step. Jesus is what He is said to be; Jesus will do what He says He will do; therefore we must each one *trust Him*, saying, "He will be to me what He says He is, and He will do to me what He has promised to do; I leave myself in the hands of Him who is appointed to save, that He may save me. I rest upon His promise that He will do even as He has said." This is a saving faith, and he who has it has everlasting life. Whatever his dangers and difficulties, whatever his darkness and depression, whatever his infirmities and sins, he who believes on Christ Jesus is not condemned and shall never come into condemnation.

Pursue Love!

Visible Demonstrations of Love

God is the embodiment of love. He is the source of all the love that has ever been seen in this world, the means by which any hurt has been healed, the vessel for any comfort, hope and encouragement. Apart from God there is no love!

John 13:34,35 A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. ³⁵ By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.”

During His absence, they were to be governed by the **commandment** of **love**. This commandment was not new in point of time because the Ten Commandments taught love to God and to one’s neighbor. But this **commandment** was **new** in other ways. It was **new** because the Holy Spirit would empower believers to obey it. It was **new** in that it was *superior* to the old. The old said, “Love your *neighbor*,” but the new said, “Love your *enemies*.”

It has been well said that the law of love to others is now explained with new clarity, enforced by new motives and obligations, illustrated by a new example, and obeyed in a new way.

Also it was new, as explained in the verse, because it called for a *higher degree* of love: **“As I have loved you, that you also love one another.”**

13:35 The badge of Christian discipleship is not a cross worn around the neck or on the lapel, or some distinctive type of clothing. Anyone could profess discipleship by these means. The true mark of a Christian is **love** for his fellow Christians. This requires divine power, and this power is only given to those indwelt by the Spirit. ⁵

1 John 4: 7,8 Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. ⁸ Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love.

THEY’LL KNOW WE ARE CHRISTIANS BY OUR LOVE

Words and Music by Peter Scholtes, 1938–

A new commandment I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. All men will know that you are My disciples if you love one another. (John 13:34, 35)

It’s easy to talk sentimentally about love. It’s much more difficult to apply it to needy people and situations. The Scriptures clearly teach, however, that the proof of God’s presence within our lives is our willingness to share His love with humanity. The earthly badge of our heavenly citizenship is our love relationship with others.

A life of love is a deliberate choice on our part. We must choose this lifestyle against our natural bent for self-centeredness. Soon, with the Holy Spirit’s enablement, our new life of love becomes a natural behavior. Then the emotional feelings of inner fulfillment follow.

⁵MacDonald, W. (1997, c1995). *Believer's Bible Commentary : Old and New Testaments* (electronic ed.) (Jn 13:34-36). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

Responding to the needs of others will never be a duty; rather it should be a privilege of normal Christian living. Our love in action will bring joy to a brother or sister in Christ and even show nonbelievers that we are Christians not only in name but in deed as well.

We are one in the Spirit, we are one in the Lord, we are one in the Spirit, we are one in the Lord, and we pray that all unity may one day be restored: And they'll know we are Christians by our love, by our love; Yes, they'll know we are Christians by our love.

We will walk with each other, we will walk hand in hand, we will walk with each other, we will walk hand in hand, and together we'll spread the news that God is in our land: And they'll know we are Christians by our love, by our love; Yes, they'll know we are Christians by our love.

We will work with each other, we will work side by side, we will work with each other, we will work side by side, and we'll guard each man's dignity and save each man's pride: And they'll know we are Christians by our love, by our love; Yes, they'll know we are Christians by our love.

All praise to the Father, from whom all things come, and all praise to Christ Jesus, His only Son, and all praise to the Spirit, who makes us one: And they'll know we are Christians by our love; Yes, they'll know we are Christians by our love.⁶

Love versus Guilt and Fear

The two most crippling forces in this world are guilt and fear. God's love deals with these destructive weapons completely in our relationship with Him.

1 John 4:17,18 In this way, love is made complete among us so that we will have confidence on the day of judgment, because in this world we are like him.¹⁸ There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love.

Guilt. Definition. The meaning usually given to the word "guilt" in Christian circles today bears little relation to the biblical meaning. Recent Christian interest in the subject focuses on its psychological dimension, analyzing the causes (and cures) of the sense of guilt, which is deep-seated in all of us and paralyzes the lives of some. It would seem to be easy to distinguish between this subjective sense of debt, which may be fed by groundless fears, and the objective guilt of sinners before God, with which the Bible is concerned.

The distinction is valid but there is more overlap than first appears. The Bible is alive to the psychological effects of guilt, as can be seen, for instance, in characters like Jephthah and David: Jephthah in his horrifying violence against fellow Israelites after his daughter's death, and David in his supine attitude toward the sins of his sons. A deep feeling of guilt, even if caused by oppressive parenting, can yet have a positive effect in deepening our appreciation of our failures before God and the debt of obedience that we owe.

The Old Testament has a semitechnical term foundational for the biblical concept of guilt, and which teaches us that guilt is fundamentally a relational idea.

Guilt and Guilt Offering in the Old Testament. The Hebrew noun *asuam* means both "guilt" (e.g., Jer. 51:5) and "guilt offering" (the term used in Lev. 5:14–19; 7:1–10, etc.). The difference between "guilt" and "sin" is important here. Whereas the words for "sin" focus on its quality as an act or as personal failure, *asuam* points to the breach in relationships that sin

⁶Osbeck, K. W. (1990). *Amazing grace : 366 inspiring hymn stories for daily devotions*. Includes indexes. (Page 63). Grand Rapids, Mich.: Kregel Publications.

causes, and in particular to the indebtedness that results. When Isaac tries to pass off Rebekah as his sister, Abimelech accuses him of nearly bringing *asuam* upon him (Gen. 26:10)—the kind of *asuam* he had already incurred with Abraham, when he had to make expensive amends for taking Sarah into his household (Gen. 20:14–16), even though God prevented him from actually committing sin (Gen. 20:6).

The legislation in Leviticus 5:14–6:7 and Numbers 5:5–10 makes this special quality of *asuam* clear. When someone incurs “guilt” toward a neighbor, full restitution must be made, plus an extra fifth. And then, in addition, a “guilt offering” must be made to the Lord, because when we sin against others and incur “indebtedness” to them, we violate the order that God prescribes for his world and his people, and have thus incurred a debt toward him also.

So an *asuam* is a debt for which we must make amends. The Old Testament points to a coming figure whose life will be an *asuam* for others (Isa. 53:10).

Liability and Forgiveness in the New Testament. The New Testament has no word equivalent to *asuam*, but this idea of indebtedness is clearly still crucial. Sins are called “debts” in the Matthean version of the Lord’s Prayer (6:12, 14). But the idea of making restitution has vanished: the debts that others owe us must simply be written off. And this is modeled on God’s action toward us: we must forgive, as he forgives us. The lost son returns to his father with an *asuam* in his hands—his readiness to make amends by being a servant rather than a son (Luke 15:18–19). But he is accepted unconditionally. In the parable of the unmerciful servant Jesus shows that we owe God an enormous debt, far greater than we could possibly repay (Matt. 18:21–35). By the smallest words of hostility we make ourselves “liable for” the fires of hell (Matt. 5:21–22), a debt we can never pay and remain alive (cf. Matt. 5:26; James 2:10).

The New Testament has no need for a word equivalent to *asuam* because we do not need to pay. The Son of Man gives his life as a “ransom for many” (Mark 10:45), paying our indebtedness for us.⁷

Shame. Shame is a consequence of sin. Feelings of guilt and shame are subjective acknowledgments of an objective spiritual reality. Guilt is judicial in character; shame is relational. Though related to guilt, shame emphasizes sin’s effect on self-identity. Sinful human beings are traumatized before a holy God, exposed for failure to live up to God’s glorious moral purpose. The first response of Adam and Eve to their sinful condition was to hide from God, and consequently from one another (Gen. 3:7–8; cf. 2:25). Christ’s unhindered openness to the Father was both a model for life and the means of removing humanity’s shame. Christian self-identity is transformed “in him.”

The word-group for shame (“disconcerted,” “disappointed,” “confounded”) occurs in the Old Testament most frequently in the Wisdom Literature and in the prophets (especially Isaiah and Jeremiah). David captures the pervasive Old Testament perspective when he says, “Let me not be put to shame, O LORD, for I have cried out to you; let the wicked be put to shame, and lie silent in the grave” (Ps. 31:17). The godly Israelite believed God would remove his or her shame (Ps. 119:31) while expecting God to defeat his or her enemies in the present as he will do it utterly at the judgment (Pss. 35:26; 44:7; 132:18). Some presumed on their elect status, ignoring faith and obedience. God shamed them and the nation by causing its defeat and dispersion (Isa. 22:18; Jer. 2:26; 7:19; Ezek. 7:18; Dan. 9:7–8). The believing Israelite

⁷Elwell, W. A. (1997, c1996). *Evangelical dictionary of biblical theology* (electronic ed.). Baker reference library; Logos Library System. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House.

remnant trusted God through suffering (Isa. 49:23; 54:4). At the final judgment the wicked will be shamed because of their utter defeat (Isa. 47:3) and because of the manifest impotence of their idols (Isa. 42:17; 44:9, 11; Jer. 22:22; Hos. 10:6). Israel, however, will not bear its shame forever (Isa. 45:17; 61:7). Proverbs emphasizes the shame of public humiliation for undisciplined behavior (13:18; 18:13; 25:8), with particular attention to family relationships (12:4; 17:2; 19:26; 29:15).

The New Testament deepens and expands the concept of shame. A disciple of Christ stands with him unashamedly in a world that finds the cross (Heb. 12:2), God's ways (1 Cor. 1:27), and God's persecuted messengers (2 Tim. 1:8, 12) shameful. Those ashamed of him now will find Christ ashamed of them on the day of judgment (Mark 8:38; Luke 9:26). Conversely, God is not ashamed to call the faithful "brothers" of Christ (Heb. 2:11).

Suffering for Christ is identification with Christ, glory not shame (Acts 5:41; 1 Peter 4:16). Paul was not ashamed of the gospel because it is the only antidote for humanity's shame (Rom. 1:16). Ultimately, the Christian who trusts in Christ need not be ashamed of anything (Phil. 1:20; cf. Isa. 28:16; Rom. 9:33; 10:11; 1 Peter 2:6). When one confesses Christ and openly rebels against him, however, the work of Christ is publicly shamed (Heb. 6:6). Christians must be diligent to renounce shameful behavior, though tempting because of its hidden character (2 Cor. 4:2).

Shame is a godly motivator. A virtuous life shames the ungodly, providing a context for vangelism (Titus 2:8; 1 Peter 3:16). A believer's shame for past sin is a spur to forsake sinning (Rom. 6:21), to renounce disobedience (2 Thess. 3:14), and to minister the gospel (2 Cor. 4:2). The prospect of shame at Christ's return is sometimes a necessary inducement to godliness (Rev. 3:18; 16:15). Paul uses the concept of shame most frequently with the immature Corinthian believers, urging them not to shame themselves (1 Cor. 4:14; 6:5; 15:34; 2 Cor. 9:4) or him (2 Cor. 7:14; 10:8).

Shameless people flaunt their unholiness, calloused to God (Zeph. 3:5) and glorying in their shame (Phil. 3:19). Yet no one is shameless ultimately. "Shameless acts" receive the judgment inherent in the act (Rom. 1:27). Also, at the final judgment the nakedness of those not clothed with Christ's righteousness will be exposed (Rev. 3:18; 16:15).⁸

Fear The fundamental and original idea expressed by these terms covers a semantic range from mild easiness to stark terror, depending on the object of the fear and the circumstances surrounding the experience. There is no separate Hebrew or Greek lexeme describing fear of God so presumably such fear was from earliest times, the same kind of reaction as could be elicited from any encounter with a surprising, unusual, or threatening entity. In time, however, fear of God or of manifestations of the divine became a subcategory of fear in general and thus developed a theological signification pervasively attested throughout the Bible. While the normal meaning of fear as dread or terror is retained in the theological use of the terms, a special nuance of reverential awe or worshipful respect becomes the dominant notion.

Fear of God or of his manifestations appears in the Bible either in the abstract, in which just the idea of God alone generates this response, or in particular situations such as theophany or miracle, the occurrence or performance of which produces fear. Examples of the latter are Israel's fear of the Lord following the exodus deliverance (Exod. 14:31) and the fear of Zechariah, father of John the Baptist, when he saw the angel of the Lord (Luke 1:12).⁹

⁸Elwell, W. A. (1997, c1996). *Evangelical dictionary of biblical theology* (electronic ed.). Baker reference library; Logos Library System. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House.

⁹Elwell, W. A. (1997, c1996). *Evangelical dictionary of biblical theology* (electronic ed.). Baker reference library; Logos Library System. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House.

Pursue Endurance!

When Jesus sent out His disciples he did not want them to be naive about their missionary endeavor. He said to them:

Matthew 10:16 I am sending you out like sheep among wolves. Therefore be as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves.

Many bail out at the first sign of trouble because they were not expecting this trouble. Christ warns us that serving Him will not be done in a vacuum. We must endure hardships.

Discipline and Endurance

Hebrews 10:36 You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what he has promised.

Just as the great heroes of the faith endured we must also endure and we are encouraged how to do this.

Hebrews 12:1-3 Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. ² Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. ³ Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.

ENDURANCE, PERSEVERANCE

Endurance is a characteristic mark of a Christian in the NT. The key Greek word that conveys this point. This word presumes that the Christian life garners opposition that must be met by spiritual resistance. The opposition may come from formal or informal persecution or from the general difficulties of life. Although it is natural to view the suffering this brings as a negative, the NT encourages Christians to contemplate the long-range blessing of successfully overcoming hardship for Christ and enduring to the end. Endurance is a virtue needed for the Christian's transition from suffering to blessing.

A second word, also encourages endurance as a characteristic mark of a Christian but in a different sense. This word, most often translated "patience," views endurance as a quality of personal relationships. It is not a response to opposition as much as a voluntary act of love for difficult and irritating people. As opposed to becoming angry and upset with others, Christians who endure in this sense control themselves and are able to do so indefinitely. Both describe Christians waiting for the return of Christ.¹⁰

¹⁰Martin, R. P. (2000, c1997). *Dictionary of the later New Testament and its developments* (electronic ed.). Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

Pursue Gentleness!

Of all the qualities of God's heart seen within this world, this is perhaps the least desired. Meekness is not something that most men in this world would pursue because it has come to be equated with weakness and passivity.

Meekness has nothing to do with weakness. Meekness is living according to the power of God, allowing His power to flow through us in all of our circumstances and in every one of our relationships.

MEEKNESS

The key to understanding the virtue of meekness is that it is not a quality of weakness but rather of strength. Meekness is not cowardice, timidity or lack of confidence. In classical Greek the word from which we derive *meekness* was used to describe tame animals, soothing medicine and a gentle breeze. The word also implies self-control. Aristotle describes it as the mean between excessive anger and excessive passivity, so that meekness can be regarded as strength under control.

The background for understanding the biblical virtues of meekness and gentleness is the disparagement of these virtues in the classical world and the humanistic philosophies that have stemmed from classicism. Most of the world's literature has exalted the conquering hero who refuses to submit and who exerts his or her interests against anyone who might challenge those interests. Most cultures have reserved their rewards for people who compete successfully through strength of will and superior power. In such a context Jesus' portrait of the ideal disciple as someone who is meek, accompanied by the promised reward that such a person will inherit the earth (Mt 5:5; cf. Ps 37:11), is a flat contradiction of conventional wisdom.

Meekness and gentleness appear in the Bible among lists of virtues, and two corresponding motifs are associated with them: they are commanded behavior, and rewards are promised to people who display these virtues. Thus the psalmist can claim that God "will hear the desire of the meek" and "will strengthen their heart" (Ps 10:17 NRSV). The meek "shall possess the land, and delight themselves in abundant prosperity" (Ps 37:11 NRSV). The day will come when "the meek shall obtain fresh joy in the LORD" (Is 29:19 NRSV). Gentleness is one of the evocative nine fruits of the Spirit against which there is no condemnation of the law (Eph 5:23), and it is one of the virtues that Paul begs the Ephesians to display as they "live a life worthy of the calling" to which they have been called (Eph 4:1–2). Meekness is a virtue that NT Christians are commanded to "put on" (Col 3:12) and "aim at" (1 Tim 6:11), and Christians are repeatedly exhorted to "be" meek or gentle (Tit 3:2; 1 Pet 2:18; cf. 1 Thess 2:7; Jas 3:13, 17). Gentleness is a prerequisite for holding church office (1 Tim 3:3), and "a quiet and gentle spirit" among wives is "in God's sight ... very precious" (1 Pet 3:4).

Yet another motif is that meekness or gentleness is commanded as the spirit in which believers are called to perform certain duties. The list of such duties includes restoring wayward Christians (Gal 6:1), correcting opponents (2 Tim 2:25), receiving the implanted word (Jas 1:21) and making a defense of the gospel (1 Pet 3:15). In many of the passages that enjoin meekness or gentleness as a virtue, it is easy to get the impression that this virtue is displayed especially in speech, a premise made explicit in the proverb that "a gentle tongue is a tree of life" (Prov 15:4 NRSV).

The two biblical characters with whom we most readily associate meekness are Moses and Jesus. We read regarding Moses that he "was very meek, more than all men that were on the face of the earth" (Num 12:3 RSV). If we examine the life of Moses, we find good evidence

that meekness is not weakness but strength under control. There is no more heroic and forceful character in the OT than Moses. He is fearless in exercising leadership against unbearable intransigence among his followers. He stands up to Pharaoh. He defends his right to lead when his authority is challenged. He is the most visible and powerful figure in the traveling nation of Israel. Yet he does all of this in the strength of God, and he himself makes no presumption to be self-reliant, nor does he use his position as leader for self-aggrandizement. The major exception is when he strikes the rock instead of obeying God's command to speak to it, accompanied by a self-importance about being the one to bring forth water ("Listen, you rebels, shall we bring water for you out of this rock?" Num 20:10 NRSV). The incongruity of Moses' behavior on this occasion with the general tenor of his life operates as a foil to highlight the prevailing quality of meekness in Moses' demeanor.

Jesus is the supreme example of meekness and gentleness. "When he was abused," writes Peter, "he did not return abuse; when he suffered, he did not threaten; but he entrusted himself to the one who judges justly" (1 Pet 2:23 NRSV). Defiant toward the religious establishment in defending the helpless and diseased, as well as opposing evil, Jesus is self-effacing in regard to his own interests. From the cross he prays that his heavenly Father would forgive those who crucify him (Lk 23:34). No wonder he characterizes himself as being "gentle and lowly in heart" (Mt 11:29 RSV). And it is no wonder, either, that when we search our own longings we find such a person to be the one to whom we would most naturally go to "find rest for [our] souls" (Mt 11:29).

Although meekness and gentleness are robustly positive virtues, not a display of passive timidity, we can nonetheless bring them into focus if we list the behaviors they are *not*. Meekness and gentleness are the opposite of harshness, a grasping spirit, vengefulness, self-aggrandizement and lack of self-control.¹¹

¹¹Ryken, L. (2000, c1998). *Dictionary of biblical imagery* pp. 545-546). Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

Notes