

PAUL'S THEOLOGY

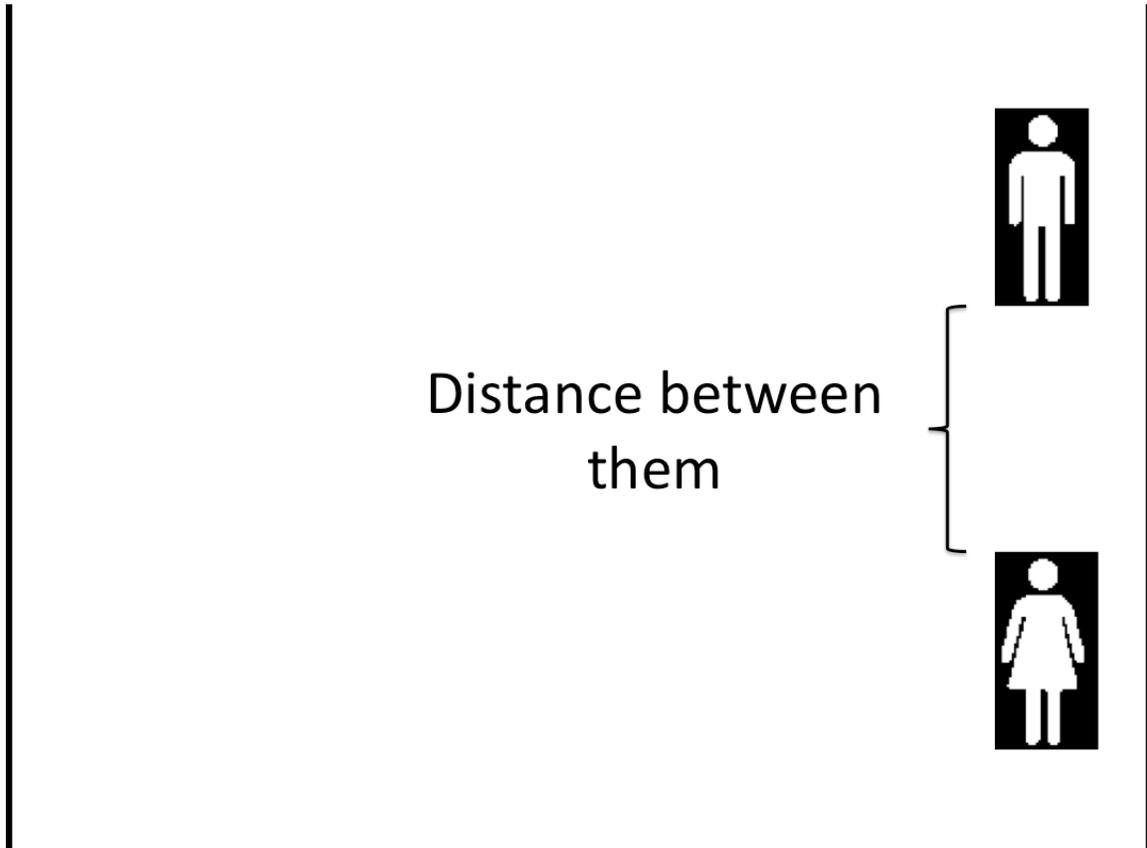
Lesson 13

The Holy Spirit Applied!

Over the last several weeks, I have spent a great deal of time talking to a dear friend who just gave his life to Jesus in the last few years. My friend is having a great deal of trouble in his marriage. His wife is not a believer, and she does not speak too highly of my friend's newfound faith!

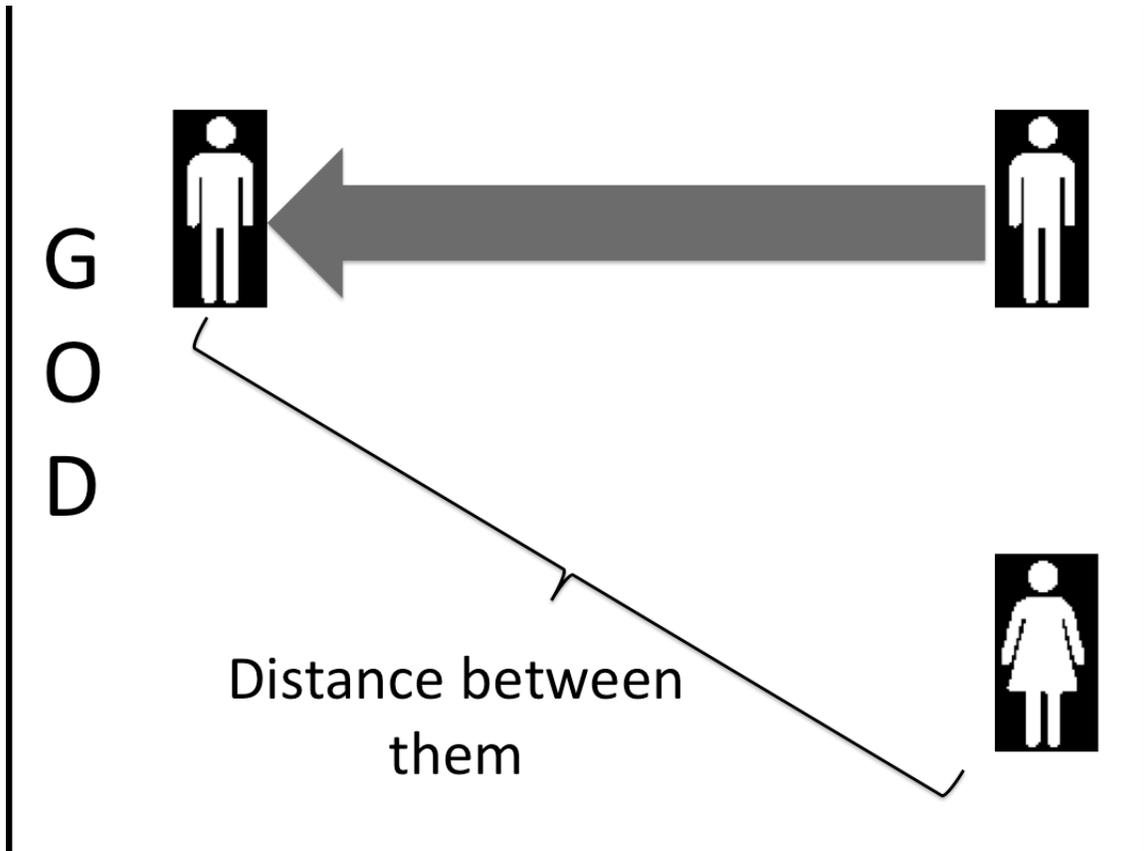
As we have discussed their issues, two things have stood out to me. First, my friend tells me that while he and his wife had issues before his conversion, the issues have just grown greater and their marriage has drifted further apart since he embraced Jesus. My friend has calluses on his knees from praying for his wife. He reads his Bible daily many times, trying to do what it teaches. After five decades of cursing and swearing every other sentence, he has committed his mouth to speaking only words seasoned with grace (that in itself is an amazing testimony having known and *heard* him for twenty years!).

Now, this increased distance between my friend and his wife makes sense to me and is not unexpected. I explained it to him in a picture:



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There had always been some distance between them and some issues they had to struggle through. Once my friend became a Christian, his life began to change. Some of the things that used to unite them did not do so any more. My friend was moving toward God, while his wife refused to do so. This naturally made the distance between them greater:



The second issue that stood out to me involved some actions of his wife. On an almost daily basis, she would curse and yell at my friend saying some really mean and hurtful things. My friend said that his wife is seeking some psychiatric help and getting some medicine. As she put it, “I do not understand, but I have absolutely no ability to control what I say. I truly have no control.”

My friend said to me, “I am praying that my wife will read James. Then, she will know:”

How great a forest is set ablaze by such a small fire! And the tongue is a fire, a world of unrighteousness...No human being can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison. With it we bless our Lord and Father with it we curse people who are made in the likeness of God (James 3:5-9).

This struck me as particularly significant in light of the lesson I was preparing for this week. I explained to my friend, as best as I could, that the victories over sin come by the strength of the Holy Spirit, not by the efforts of unregenerate man. His wife as an unregenerate woman would likely not have that victory, at least not in a real lasting sense.

Now, do not get me wrong, even for Christians, it is a struggle to overcome sin, especially ones deeply set in character and personal history. But the Christian has a weapon that enables victory – the Spirit of God. That is the point that Paul makes over and over, as we see in today’s lesson.

PAUL EXPLAINS HOW THE HOLY SPIRIT APPLIES TO LIFE

To borrow an analogy from Lesson One, at this point in these lessons on the Holy Spirit, we are building a more complicated structure using the legos (teachings) of past lessons. Let us review them briefly:¹

1. The Holy Spirit, as Paul learned from his Old Testament studies, was expressed by a word that emphasized the effects of moving wind (*ruach*). The Spirit came upon certain special people for certain special times, but did not fall on all God’s believers. God used the Spirit as his messenger through the lives of people, bringing judgment and hope.
2. Jesus taught that the Holy Spirit would descend upon all his believers after his ascension into heaven. The Holy Spirit would indwell the believer; teaching and helping her/him understand the relationship of the believer and God. The Spirit would bring glory to Christ taking what is Christ’s and making it known to the believer. Paul both knew and experienced the truth of Christ’s teaching.

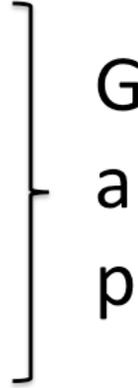
We now begin to explore the ways in which Paul understood and explained the Holy Spirit, expanding on the teachings of the Old Testament and Christ.

We remember that Paul focused his preaching on the crucified and risen Messiah. As Paul wrote to the Corinthians, “I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified” (1 Cor. 2:2). That was Paul’s message. Yet for Paul, that teaching included the Holy Spirit. For Paul continues just two verses later saying that his teaching on the crucified Christ came in “demonstration of the Spirit and of power.”

We get a key here to the close role for Paul between the Spirit and the Savior. To best follow Paul’s thought, we might consider a more graphic understanding of the life and role of Jesus:

¹ These lessons can be downloaded in audio or written form at www.Biblical-Literacy.com.

- Jesus becomes flesh
- Jesus dies an atoning death
- Jesus is resurrected by the Spirit
- Jesus ascends to heaven



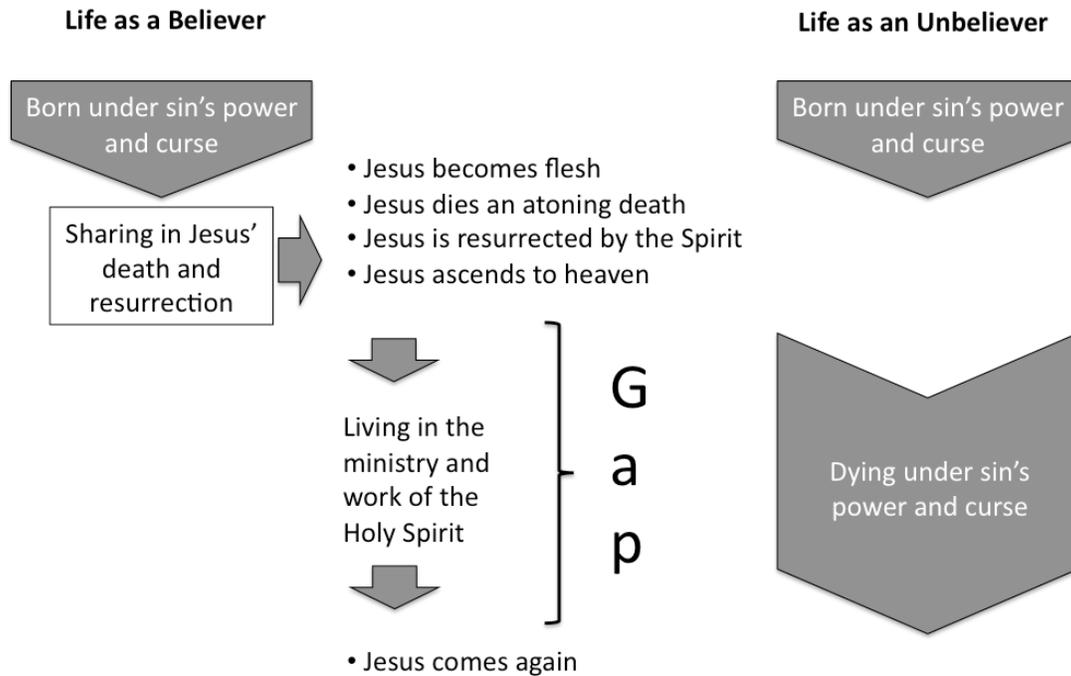
- Jesus comes again

We live, as Paul did, in what we have termed above, the Gap. We live in the Gap between the time of Christ's ascension and his second coming. During this time, Christ sits in heaven at God's right hand and Paul teaches that the Holy Spirit carries out Christ's work on earth.

Now, Paul would not say that Christ is absent from earth, nor would he say that Christ is limited in some physical way and only able to be in one place at one time. But, Paul teaches that Christ is present and working on earth through the Spirit.

For those of us, living in this Gap like Paul, we live in a time of ministry and work of the Holy Spirit. That is the thrust of Paul's teaching that we follow today.

If Paul were going over our chart, then I suspect he would want us to point out something missing. Namely, while humanity itself exists in the time between the ascension of Christ and the second coming, not all humanity participates in the Holy Spirit's ministry. For humans are born firstly as descendants of Adam. As such, we are under the slave power of sin, which leads absolutely to death. Many in this condition never come to Christ, and they die in their own sins. Those who experience the Spirit are those who share in the death of Christ and his resurrection. Paul then, might add to our drawing and give two more columns:



What we are attempting to show is that the believer and the non-believer are both born under the power and curse of sin. The believer comes to Christ and shares in his death and resurrection. The believer then lives in the Gap when Jesus is physically gone from earth experiencing the Holy Spirit's ministry and work.

The non-believer, like the believer, is born under the power of sin and the curse. The non-believer, however, does not share in Christ's death and resurrection and dies as a cursed sinner.

The thrust of what we are trying to set out is Paul's teaching that the Spirit is both the power to resurrect Christ and also the power to infuse the Christian life in Christ. The Spirit is Christ's messenger. He comes forth to teach and bring to the believer that which is Christ's.

Let us consider more direct terminology of Paul. Paul explains that it is through the Spirit that we understand and cry, "Abba Father."² We have received "the Spirit of adoption as sons."

² Romans 8:15 – "For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, "Abba! Father!" Galatians 4:6 – "□And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!"

We have previously discussed Paul's use of the term "sons" here not as a sexist reference, but rather as a legal one. It is the sons who had the inheritance rights under Roman law that Paul saw belonging to all believers. We have this inheritance by the Spirit. In this sense, Paul explains the work of the Spirit in a clear echo of Christ's teaching, "He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you. All that the Father has is mine; therefore I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you" (Jn 16:14-15).

We can now address in a bit more detail, the life in the Spirit for the believer. What is life like for the believer living in the Gap? What do we inherit as adopted sons? Paul gives us a number of inheritances. First and foremost, we have inherited:

Freedom

Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 3:17 that,

"Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom."

The Spirit has set us free in Christ. This freedom exists on many levels. Richard Longenecker sets out three areas of freedom (he uses the term "liberty") that we have in Christ: (1) freedom before God; (2) personal freedom; and (3) social freedom.³ Although these are not hard and fast categories, they are useful for us in understanding Paul on this point.

1. **Freedom before God.** The believer, by the power of the Holy Spirit is no longer bound up in God's judgment as a sinner. The Believer is no longer accountable under God's laws of perfection. We find Paul going into great detail on this in Romans 8. In verses 1 and 2, Paul writes, "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of *the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus.*" Not only has the Spirit set us "free in Christ Jesus," but it also is detailed as a freedom "from the law of sin and death." This is a freedom to live as an heir of God's. "For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God," Paul explains later in verse 14. This is the Spirit of adoption crying Abba Father (verse 15). This is the "Spirit himself [who] bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs – heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ" (Rom. 8:16-17). We have freedom as sons before Almighty God and, as Paul adds later, "If God is for us, who can be against us?" (Rom. 8:31).
2. **Personal freedom.** As believers, although Satan would like us to never know or understand this, we have a freedom from the power of sin! As

³ Richard Longenecker, *Paul, Apostle of Liberty* (Harper & Row 1964) 170-174.

unbelievers, Paul has “already charged that all, both Jews and Greeks, are under sin” (Rom. 3:9). But as believers, “our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. For one who has died has been *set free from sin*” (Rom. 6:6-7). This is not to say that we are sinless or that we are no longer tempted by sin. Paul teaches those problems throughout his ministry.⁴ But, Christians have something the unbeliever does not have. In the Spirit is the power to say, “No!” In the Spirit, we have “put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator” (Col. 3:10). This is a life of transformation, little by little, day by day, into the image of the Son.

This personal freedom also involves liberty from the law. Paul was clear of this aspect of the Spirit filled life in Romans 7:4-6:

Likewise, my brothers, you also have died to the law through the body of Christ, so that you may belong to another, to him who has been raised from the dead, in order that we may bear fruit for God. For while we were living in the flesh, our sinful passions, aroused by the law, were at work in our members to bear fruit for death. But now **we are released from the law**, having died to that which held us captive, so that *we serve in the new way of the Spirit and not in the old way of the written code.*

This freedom is not one of license to sin! Far be it!!! As Longenecker put it, “Christian liberty finds its basis in Christ and must be considered both a gift and a demand.”⁵ So the freedom is not a freedom from control, rather, it is a freedom from the control of sin and into the control of the Spirit!

We must add here another aspect of personal freedom that Paul taught, even though in some 21st century circles this area gets little attention. Paul taught that we have a freedom from unseen “rulers and authorities” whom Christ has “disarmed” triumphing over them (Col. 2:15). It is the sword of the Spirit we use in battle against the “rulers, against the authorities, against

⁴ Consider 1 Thes. 3:5 – “For this reason, when I could bear it no longer, I sent to learn about your faith, for fear that somehow the tempter had tempted you and our labor would be in vain.” 1 Cor. 7:5 – “Do not deprive one another, except perhaps by agreement for a limited time, that you may devote yourselves to prayer; but then come together again, so that Satan may not tempt you because of your lack of self-control.” 2 Cor. 2:10-11 – “Anyone whom you forgive, I also forgive. Indeed, what I have forgiven, if I have forgiven anything, has been for your sake in the presence of Christ, so that we would not be outwitted by Satan; for we are not ignorant of his designs.”

⁵ Longenecker at 181.

the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places” (Eph 6:10-19).

3. **Social Freedom.** In the Spirit, we do not live singular lives, but rather we are built up into a community of believers, into a body. Paul writes of a “unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit” (Eph. 4:3-4). Similarly in Philippians 2:1-2, Paul appeals to the Spirit for Christian unity, “if there is...any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind.”

Communion with Christ

In addition to the freedoms we have in our walk in the Spirit, we have much more in our inheritance. Our inheritance is one that brings us into communion with the risen Christ. Paul writes of this in a wonderful teaching using the Old Testament to bring home a spiritual truth about the days in the Gap!

In 2 Corinthians 3, Paul is defending the power and significance of his ministry. Paul contrasts his ministry to that of Moses. Paul says that the Corinthians themselves are his letters of credentials because they were “written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts” (2 Cor. 3:3). This is a new covenant contrasted with the one of Moses. God “made us competent to be ministers of a new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit. For the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.”

Paul then reminds the Corinthians that Moses received his “ministry of death, carved in letters of stone” with such glory that his face shown brightly, necessitating a veil. Paul explains that if the ministry of death could produce such a shining glory, the ministry of the Spirit must do so even more! “For if there was glory in the ministry of condemnation, the ministry of righteousness must far exceed it in glory” (2 Cor. 3:9).

Paul understood many Jews failed to see the glory of Christ shining from the Spirit because their veils were still covering their faces through hardened hearts. But, any who turn to Jesus have the veil removed, “where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom.” Then, we have the ultimate blessing from the work of the Spirit, the ultimate point of adoption:

And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit (2 Cor. 3:18).

Other inheritances

Life in the Gap has other experiences for the child of God. We have the Spirit as a first gift (Rom. 8:23); it is a “seal” of our inheritance, given “in our hearts as a guarantee” (2 Cor. 1:22).⁶ In this sense, Paul sees the believer as living in the Gap, yet also living on the other side of eternity. Our life in the Spirit is one that is sealed for our final redemption (“And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption” Eph. 4:30).

In the Gap, we have the Spirit, who has set us free from death before God, from bondage to sin, from the forces of evil, from the letter of the law. The Spirit has marked us, and sealed us for eternity, a guarantee from God that we are his and he is ours. The Spirit has brought us into communion with the ascended Savior, and if that is not enough, Paul even teaches that the Spirit works to intercede with us before God when we do not know how to pray as we should! (Rom. 8:26 – “Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words.”) Praise God for the work of the Spirit!

Next week, we will consider what Paul says about what some term “Excesses of the Spirit!”

POINTS FOR HOME

1. *“The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs.”* (Rom. 8:16-17).

Have you ever seen a movie, read a story, or heard about someone who received a huge inheritance from a distant relative or acquaintance? Have you ever wondered what it would be like? Wonder no more! The believer in Christ has received the Spirit confirming our place in God’s family. Not a distant relative, a Father! Not an inheritance that *might* come some day, but one where we already have the seal and guarantee. In fact, the inheritance is already at work in us, changing us daily into the image of Jesus. Let us not live as beggars whipped about by Satan as if we have no power! God is for us! Who can be against us! The rain may fall, the temptations may arise, we may even fail and sin, but Jesus is at God’s right hand, his Spirit dwells within us, and we are called to his glorious greatness! Let us declare it and live it!

⁶ See many other passages in this regard including 2 Cor. 5:5 – “He who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who has given us the Spirit as a guarantee.” Eph. 1:13-14 – “In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory.”

2. *“There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death”* (Rom. 8:1-2).

Freedom! As J.B. Phillips translates it, we are free from the “old vicious circle of sin and death.” We know who we are, we know who is Lord, we know what we should do, and we have the power available to do it should we chose. That is true freedom! Let us walk in victory through this freedom. If our tongue is our problem, then let us pray and by the Spirit’s power, change! If we are missing kindness, joy, patience, or any fruit of the Spirit, let us pray and choose to walk in it! We should remember this is a deliberative process. It is easy to go with the flow and live in the flesh of our old man, pre-Christ. We should make a conscious choice daily to walk in the Spirit. Then, see if God is not faithful to transform us into his Son’s image.

3. *“All who are led by the Spirit are sons of God.”* (Rom. 8:14).

Led by the Spirit...is that a voice inside? Is that a hunch or a feeling? Beware here! For the heart is deceitful above all things. Many people follow their heart convinced they are following God’s Spirit. Might I suggest that the Spirit has given us scripture, and that 90 percent of what we need to decide is right and wrong, God’s will from the will of man or the tempter, is found in Scripture? If so, then would we not be well served to spend volume time reading, studying, and praying through Scripture? Let us choose to do so starting today!