

ARE YOU A PSALM ONE OVERCOMER?

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PSALM I : I - 6

*Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly,
nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful.*

*But his delight is in the law of the LORD;
and in his law doth he meditate day and night.*

*And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water,
that bringeth forth his fruit in his season;
his leaf also shall not wither;
and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper.*

*The ungodly are not so:
but are like the chaff which the wind driveth away.*

*Therefore the ungodly shall not stand in the judgment,
nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous.*

*For the LORD knoweth the way of the righteous:
but the way of the ungodly shall perish.*

RU Blessed? You can be! God clearly outlines for us in Psalm One how we can have a happy and blessed life. It is what most people desire, but few have. I once followed the path of the ungodly which led to a very unhappy life. However, when I began to follow the “blessed” path, I found no greater joy than being “in” Him. I have discovered what made me become a Psalm One loser and have decided from this point forward on to become a Psalm One chooser!

I would think the biggest mistake I made as a Christian school teen was my failure to realize I was negligent in my personal walk with God. I thought because I had read and memorized the Bible for years, that I was a strong Christian and walked with God.

I obeyed the rules and followed my leader’s wishes. However, internally, I had a quite different battle raging. Though I obeyed my authority, I consistently questioned them in everything they taught or wanted from me. I found flaw in each of them; and when I couldn’t find a fault, I assumed it was there, but it had just not surfaced yet. I trusted few people, and considered it all to be hypocrisy.

They did have flaws, and they did have weaknesses. But as a young person, I didn’t know how to process all of that in my mind in order to keep it out of my heart. Just because it is in one’s head, does not mean it has to be in one’s heart!

During these years of negative, pessimistic meditations I continued to read, memorize, and hear the Bible when it was preached. But I cannot remember any passage or verse or sermon that one time clearly spoke out against what I was doing. I never felt the internal persuasion of the Holy Spirit convicting my improper meditations. As I look back now, I realize that I had made one primary mistake as a young person. I was reading, studying, memorizing and hearing the Bible as it was preached, but I had never taken the most important step in my Christian life. I was not meditating on the Bible!

Here is a truth that you cannot get past. God did not promise to prosper Bible readers and God did not promise that you “might not sin” if you memorize the Bible. Bible reading and memorization is good, but it does not guarantee you prosperity or protection from sin.

No, the only thing that guarantees prosperity in life and protection from sin is Bible meditation! Psalm One is not speaking of Bible reading. It is speaking of Bible meditation.

Likewise, Psalm 119:11 reads, *“Thy word have I hid in mine heart that I might not sin against thee”* is not referring to some sort of “sin protection” for memorizers. Rather, it is insinuating that there is “sin protection” for meditators of the Word. *“Let the words of my mouth, and the meditations of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight, O LORD, my strength, and my redeemer”* (Psalm 19:14). Once again, we memorize in our heads but we meditate in our hearts.

Yes, God has promised prosperity but it is found “in” the right place. Yes, God has promised a more sure form of protection from sin, whereby you “might not” sin, but it is found “in” the right place. Both of those places are not found “in” Bible reading or “in” Bible memorization. Rather, they are found “in” your heart—that is to say, “in” your daily Bible meditations.

So as a child, I was ever so right to read my Bible and memorize large portions of His Word. However, because I never meditated on it, my heart had free reign to think thoughts that didn’t match up with Philippians 4:8 thinking.

Had I meditated on that which was true and of good report (the very things which God had shown me in my Bible reading), then those negative realities or those pessimistic allusions would have had no room in which to dwell.

That is why we are told by Paul in 2 Corinthians 10:3, *“For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh...”*. Paul is saying that we may be surrounded by the limits of our physical nature, but that does not mean we have to engage in a war with our sinful desires. He then gives us the battle strategy that ends the war within the next verse.

“(For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds;) Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ...”. Paul is clearly telling us that in order to win the battle with “sin” we have to control what is going on with “in”!

He tells us to “cast down imaginations.” Imaginations are stored images. Wow! What a truth! Do you have any idea how many negative, pessimistic, critical, impure, or immoral imaginations the average CHRISTIAN has stored in their memory banks? It must be innumerable for even the best of humans. But, in order for those thoughts to negatively impact our lives a second time, they must be pulled from the heart and placed “in” the meditator. Paul says that when a wrong thought stored in the mind is stimulated by an outside circumstance, we should cast it down; for that thought surely is not in obedience to Christ. We cannot think about sinful stored images (whether critical or impure) without being in direct disobedience to Christ. If we are not in obedience to Christ then we are no longer “in Him.” We have now engaged “in sin.”

You may be obeying every rule, submitting to every request of your leaders, reading, memorizing, attending, and praying. But you are “in” sin; for it is what is within a man that defiles him. Jesus taught us, *“That which cometh out of the man, that defileth the man. For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness: All these evil things come from within, and defile the man”*
(Mark 7:20-23.)

He issued a similar statement at another point in His ministry in Matthew 15:18 saying, *“those things which proceed out of the mouth come forth from the heart; and they defile the man.”*

In 2 Corinthians 10:6, Paul concluded his teaching on meditation preparation by telling us that when we reject our thoughts, we get immediate revenge over them. They try to harm us, but we harm the thought instead. *“And having in a readiness to revenge all disobedience, when your obedience is fulfilled.”* When we gain revenge on that negative thought we refuse its potential power over us and weaken its future power over us. The thought, when we refuse to feed it through meditations, will only grow weaker. Eventually, if you will not feed it with wrong meditations, you will starve it; and it will die. This places you in a stronger position to have the wrong thought forgotten altogether.

However, when you succumb to the desire of your mind, will, or emotions to meditate on that thought, you are simply feeding it and making it stronger. The more you think about that thought, the more it will control you. When it eventually gains optimum control over the meditations of your heart, it will expose itself to others.

Jesus taught this truth again in Luke 6:45 — *“A good man out of the good treasure of his heart bringeth forth that which is good; and an evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart bringeth forth that which is evil: for of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaketh.”*

We say at RU that “before you ever did it, you think it.” It was so true in my life as well. Before I ever criticized my authority, I first thought critical thoughts and before I ever rebelled against authority, I rebelled inwardly.

But please remember what I said earlier. If you are not “in Christ” with proper meditations, then you are “in sin” with improper meditations. But what sins are you “in,” and who is it that is bringing about this demise in your meditator? Is it the devil? Well, yes, sort of. But in reality, it is those outside of your umbrella whom you have allowed to come “in” to your inner circle.

You see, in the passage in Psalm One that defines God’s plan for the prosperity of man, we are told that we are to meditate “in” this book of the law both day and night. That, along with a few other recommendations found within the passage, would have placed me in a strong position for prosperity when I graduated. However, His Book was not in my meditations because I was “in” something far more dangerous that would prove to end all chances for my own prosperity.

My life would soon bottom out as a result of not only what was not “in” my meditation, but because of what was “in” my meditations. I had stepped out of my position of being “in Him” and had stepped “in” three different positions that God had promised through David would lead to unhappiness and misery. Let’s look at this formula.

Psalm 1:1 teaches us that *“Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful.”* Please notice that there are three positions that lead to being happy if they are followed. They are all found within the umbrella of protection. However, if we instead choose the “umbrella of rejection,” then these alternative positions of rejecting authority will lead to unhappiness. They are considered positional because they all start with our preposition “in.”

The first position of “in” that puts us in “sin” is when we reject our umbrella’s godly counsel and instead choose to walk “in” the counsel of the ungodly. The counsel of the ungodly simply means to get advice from those who do not love God. To walk in this ungodly counsel is to do so repeatedly and to actually follow their advice. This is a positional failure for it leads you away from the position of “in” and lands you in the position of “sin.” As a youth, I obeyed my teachers, preachers, and parents on the outside; but on the inside, I was in stark rebellion to their wishes.

One of my first compromises was to listen to bad music. I still remember the first song I willingly listened to as a child. I had been given a clock radio and had tried to find a station to wake to every morning. I chose one that I would later learn was an “easy listening” radio station. The music seemed harmless and the fact that it did not seem to have a negative affect on me caused me to doubt my authority’s years of counsel to avoid bad music. It seemed harmless, so I continued to listen. But eventually the music got harder and it began to exploit the weaknesses of adult authority. The music had a way of exposing the fact that I was underappreciated, that I was being taken advantage of by those over me. It taught me that authority wasn’t fair and was flawed. I began to meditate on this music as I would sing it and listen to its words throughout my “alone” time away from those who loved God—my umbrella.

Eventually, the lies of the music became the truths of my heart. I had accepted this negative, critical, pessimistic view of adult authority. I began to reject the opinions of my parents, my preachers, my teachers, my employers, and even the government; for it was all an evil plot to spoil my life. How silly of me to allow such wickedness to control my meditator. I had stunted my Spirit’s influence, for I was walking in sin. I was taking repeated steps “in” the counsel of the ungodly.

The second position of “in” that puts us in “sin” is when we reject our umbrella’s godly friends and instead choose to stand “in” the way of sinners. The word “way” means path. Sinners are intentional wrong doers. They are people who know that they should do good, but choose to do otherwise (James 4:17). They are sinners, and we ought not stand in their path. The word “stand” here means to be placed or situated. It is literally teaching us that we ought not to congregare with those who do wrong. If you are “in” the way of sinners, you cannot also remain “in” Christ. You cannot be “in Him” and run with those who are “in sin.”

This was my second mistake. I grew up in a neighborhood that had multiple kids my age who attended my Christian school. But, in my teen years, I began to choose after-school friends in the neighborhood who did wrong. It wasn’t that they were extremely wicked, they just were wrong-doers. At first, I just played neighborhood sports with them—baseball, football, and riding around on our bikes. But eventually, I became old enough to drive. I would go where they went, and I would sometimes do the things that they would do. I was in their way, and they got in God’s way.

Though we just “hung around” so to speak, eventually these young neighborhood boys became young men. I can still remember the first time I was faced with something that was obviously sin for it was something against every entity of my umbrella—it was something illegal. It was the summer of my 17th birthday. My next door neighbor was fifteen and a wrong-doer. He was critical of authority and disobedient to his parents. We played ball together and had become good friends. But that summer he went to visit his cousin in St. Louis, Missouri. While he was there, my young friend was introduced to marijuana by his uncle. Upon his return from summer vacation, my friend brought home some to share with his friends. I remember that day when I walked into my friend’s garage, and he was lying on a discarded mattress. He was smoking what looked to be a strange looking cigarette. My friend had picked up smoking cigarettes six months earlier, and with my being in his “way” I had already smoked a few myself. My curiosity led me to try his marijuana cigarette. In five minute’s time I had rejected every authority in my life: the rules of my parents, the sermons of my preacher, the lessons of my teachers, the policies of my employer, and the laws of my government.

In just a few short minutes I was “in” deep “sin,” without so much as a warning from my meditator. Was it because I was walking “in” the counsel of ungodly musicians? Was it because I was standing “in” the way with those who did great wrong? No, it was because I had stepped out of my position of being “in Him” prior to my introduction to the external sin. As a result, my mind was not stayed “on Him.” It was meditating on the flaws “of them”!

My disposition had affected my position. I could not remain “in Him” as long as I was thinking negative, critical, pessimistic thoughts. I wasn’t “walking” right and I wasn’t “standing” right because I was “thinking” wrong! After ten years of sermons and Christian education, I had become addicted to rock music and was dabbling with drugs. Before the summer ended, I had drunk my first beer. What in the world was happening? That which had defiled me on the inside was “proceeding” out of my heart.

And sure enough, eventually these wrong-doers joined my favorite musicians as ungodly counsel. And what type of counsel was it? It was counsel that spoke well to my heart; the kind of counsel that my heart had learned to love and embrace. It was counsel that was critical, negative, and pessimistic of my authority. That is the third position of “in” that puts us in “sin.” It is when we reject our Umbrella’s positive encouragement and instead choose to “sit ‘in’ the seat of the scornful.”

The word scornful means a person who scorns. To scorn is to hold in contempt. Contempt means to despise. Thus, to scorn another means to “despise someone in your heart,” and over a period of time, to eventually allow it to “proceed” out of the heart. This will surely happen for Jesus taught that “*out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh*” (Matthew 12:34).

Now, when someone sits “in” the seat of the scornful, it is referring to someone who literally takes the position of a scorner. That is to say a scorner scorns. A person hears the scorn, and as a result of that negative communication, begins to think like the scorner, act like scorner, and eventually will scorn like the scorner. They have taken the scorner’s position.

I can remember how this began to materialize in my life. Of course, the ungodly counsel of my music and its musicians, as well as the wrong-doing of my friends was all accompanied by much scorn in and of itself. So, as a Christian school teen that had developed a hard heart with negative meditations, wrong counsel, and bad friends, I soon sought out new friends when I was at school who would agree with my new dispositions that had negatively affected my position “in Christ.” In other words, the only good influence left in my day—attending my Christian school, was soon ruled ineffective because I found friends who were beginning to be “free” thinkers themselves.

Do you know what a free thinker is? It is an oxymoron. A free thinker thinks that he is free to think as he chooses. He believes that when he is “in Christ” he does not have the freedom to choose what he will think. He is surrounded by the limits of Christ when he is “in Christ” and is unable to think freely the thoughts of negativity that he so chooses.

So the free thinker will reject his position “in Christ” so that he can think the way he chooses absent of the conviction of a grieved Spirit. However, free thinking will always eventually place you in bondage. For freedom is measured by the presence of the boundaries of Christ, not the absence thereof. I like to tell our students that “it was my “stinkin’ thinkin” that led me to drinkin’!”

Having rejected my authority and relegated them to a position of irrelevance in my life, I then would spend my days in the Christian school daydreaming during the preaching and thinking and then scorning with my new friends between classes and at athletic practices. I had taken the position of my ungodly new counselors. I had taken the position of my new friends that were doing wrong. That new position was sitting “in” the seat of those scorners.

I still remember how it all panned out. That senior year after the marijuana cigarette and my first drink, I went back to school, and we had no youth pastor. Our former youth pastor, Paul Kingsbury, had been elevated to the position of senior pastor and a replacement was not formed for two years. So, during my senior year of high school, we had no youth pastor and of course no youth activities. No summer camp, no teen nights, no teen church services, nothing. I had waited many years for my older brother to graduate so that I could enjoy my last two years of high school and do the things he had done in senior high.

He seemed to have so much fun as a senior. He loved the school and was close to Pastor Kingsbury. He encouraged me that my time would come and I would have an equally special senior year. He was already showing signs of being different from me. He was always defending my mom, dad, and Pastor Paul. He seemed so happy and refused to play sports with the bad kids in the neighborhood. He would sit at home and watch old movies. He would rather watch “The Three Stooges” while I was hanging out with all my stooges! Is it any wonder that my brother went on to college, married young, raised a godly heritage in his children, and now pastors a church in southern California?

Yet, as I entered that eagerly awaited senior year, it never happened the way I had dreamed or my brother had encouraged me that it would. For some strange reason, we had only four students in my senior class. This destroyed the camaraderie of our class as we were missing a great many of our friends. Our school had started losing students a few years earlier; and, as a result of an extremely low enrollment, our sports teams plummeted and playing ball that year was an embarrassment. With no youth pastor, there would be no activities, no strong leadership, and no fellowship with my fellow Christian teens. This all led me to develop unhealthy relationships with the people I worked with at Wendy’s Old Fashioned Hamburgers.

However, there was one bright spot that developed, or so I thought. A new student who was quite enjoyable to hang around with joined my class in my senior year. He was friendly, funny, and a lot like me. We became fast friends. However, he had a troubled past and was attending our school after having spent a few years in a reform school. Of course, a young man like this would surely struggle with authority, and he did; not only on the outside but on the inside.

Since I appeared to others to be a submissive student and was thought to be a fine Christian young man, many of our school teachers and staff preachers assumed that I would be a good influence on my new friend. However, a good apple can never turn a rotten bushel good. Rather, one bad apple turns a whole bushel bad. My friend, Tim, had the boldness to defy authority externally in a way that I had only wished I could. He always seemed to get away with it!

As I look back now, I remember that Tim's father had left the family years earlier. His mother worked multiple jobs to keep the family in Christian school. I admire his mother for all her hard work on behalf of her four boys. I, like Tim, was the second-born of four boys. I did have a dad. He is what kept my rebellion internal. If my rebellion was known on the outside, my father would reprove it right away. This kept me civil, but none the less, critical. But just as my rebellion to my umbrella was internal, my critical spirit toward my umbrella was internal as well.

For this reason, I remained out of trouble. I went to church, got decent grades at school, obeyed my parents and teachers, listened to the preaching, and read my Bible—sometimes. I was following all the rules, so they had to leave me alone! But I was not walking with God.

Tim, on the other hand, did not have that help in his home. I think it led him to be bitter toward God and authority. Absent of strong male leadership in the home, his negativity was able to rise to the surface and manifest itself in interpersonal conflict with almost every adult in his life.

By allowing Tim to come into my life, I now discern that God was beginning to bring my own critical spirit, dwelling within the meditator of my heart, to the surface so that I could deal with my sin.

As Tim would act out his bitter feelings toward the boundaries of authority, I soon followed suit. However, I knew how to perform for my leaders. I was careful and allowed my criticism to come out only to those I had befriended. I found great delight in convincing my fellow schoolmates to take my position as a scorner, to hear my critique, to believe my critique, to accept my critique, to adopt my critique, and to advance my critique to those they knew.

What in the world had happened to me? I had taken the seat of a scorner and was training others to do the same. It was nearly twenty years later, that I finally realized my sin and repented. It took the supernatural empowerment of the Holy Spirit and much crucifixion on my part in order to gain the victory over this over-practiced habit.

So, as a young man with a near-perfect upbringing, I had a choice. I could have been surrounded by the limits of the Lord Jesus Christ. I could have chosen to remain "in Christ," but I chose to walk "in" the counsel of the ungodly. I could have gained my position "in Christ" again, but I chose to stand "in" the way of sinners. Finally, just before graduation, I could have regained my position "in Christ" but I chose to sit "in" the seat of the scornful.

As a result of choosing wrong positions in my youth, I developed a troubled disposition throughout my life. I was "in" the wrong place. And that had made all the difference.

When God explained through David (the writer of Psalm One) His plan for the prosperity for man, He told us how not to walk, how not to stand, and how not to sit. But it is unlike God to tell us how "not" to do something without also telling us how to do something. He gave some good advice in this chapter when he gave us these three "don'ts" as well as the "do's" that we will discuss later.

But before we look at those do's, I want us to first look at another portion of the Bible where God teaches us where we "ought" to walk, where we "ought" to stand, and where we "ought" to sit.

These passages are given to us by God through the Apostle Paul. A great majority of Paul's teaching is on gaining, remaining, and maintaining wonderful Spirit-filled living. First, let us examine where God wants us to sit. Through David he told us not to sit "in" the seat of the scornful. However, in Galatians God tells us we are to be seated "in" heavenly places.

In Ephesians 2:4-6 we read, *“But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, Even when we were dead ‘in’ sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, by (grace ye are saved;) And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together ‘in’ heavenly places ‘in Christ Jesus’...”*

Paul teaches us that when we were dead “in” sins, Christ quickened us and our position changed from being dead “in” sin, to being seated “in” the heavens. When we are “in Christ,” we are seated together in heavenly places. If we would personify that in our meditations, we would not find ourselves being so critical. You know, if you were literally seated in heaven with Christ right now you wouldn’t only “not” be negative, you probably would even struggle to be positive, for we would most assuredly be speechless!

There is not much to complain about in heaven. Who am I kidding? There’s nothing to complain about in heaven! If we would recognize our position “in Christ” is a heavenly position, not a worthless, critical disposition we would forever change the way we view the difficult circumstances of this life. If you want to keep yourself from sitting “in” the seat of the scornful, then take your rightful position “in Christ” and sit right down “in” your heavenly place.

Not only does God tell us where not to sit and where we ought to sit, but God also tells us where not to stand. He tells us not to stand “in” the way of sinners. But He will not tell you in the age of the law where not to stand without telling you in the age of grace where to stand. This answer is also given to us by the daily dying Apostle Paul. His God-given answer to where to stand was given in Galatians 5:1 where we are told to *“Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage.”*

What an amazing reminder of how quickly we can go from being found to being bound. He said that we need to stand fast. That means that a simple slow step will end us back into bondage! Rather, in order to maintain freedom from the bondage of sin, we must stand fast “in” our liberty. The word stand means to remain upright. It is the opposite of a fall. In order to not only stand “in” your liberty but to remain standing, you must stand fast. The word “fast” means to be firmly fixed; fixed means to be settled. So God is instructing us through the Apostle Paul to become settled firmly into an upright position that will keep us from falling.

One of the reasons our students in RU fall away from the Lord is because they simply fall away! They are unable to remain standing for long periods of time. The primary reason they fail to remain standing is because they are not “settled ‘in’ Christ.” If a student using the discernment that is provided to those who are “in Christ” would learn the value of remaining settled “in” Christ they would not only recognize the value of standing, they would clearly foresee the dangers of impending falls.

When we position ourselves firmly fixed “in Christ,” we can become settled into a position of victory over our past bondages. As we remain “in Christ,” we are given a special anointing that we might retain that victory.

Of course, when we stand “in” the way of sinners, we have taken steps out from underneath the umbrella of protection offered to those “in Christ.” If you take steps, then we are no longer “standing.” Having taken wrong steps, you are officially now walking. If you are going to walk rather than stand, you are going to have to be very careful, or you will walk right “out” of being “in Christ.”

Realizing that as valuable soldiers we would be rather ineffective if we had to metaphorically stand still, he considered walking another important qualification of the “in Christ” Christian. But, God knew that walking would be dangerous. That is why God warned us where not to walk in the book of Psalms when he warned us not to walk “in” the counsel of the ungodly. However, in the book of Galatians, God tells us where to walk.

In Galatians 5:16 we are taught to *“...walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh.”* So, we learn exactly where to walk when we begin to take our upright position “in Christ” forward “in” to battle. We are to take repeated steps (walk) “in” the Spirit. If we take every step “surrounded by the influence” of the Lord Jesus Christ, then we can remain upright, while walking. We can both stand and walk at the same time. But we must both stand and walk “in Christ.” For, if we remain “in” the Spirit, we will not fulfill the lust of the flesh.

Our flesh is our soul’s intellectual, psychological, or emotional desires to submit to the desires of sin that dwells within our body. In other words, when we walk “after the flesh” we are rejecting the Spirit’s control over our soul and choosing to allow

our body to have authority over our soul. If we choose not to stand still and firmly fixed in our liberty and would rather enjoy the freedom to move at will, then we are going to have to conform our will to the desires of our indwelling Spirit in order that we may remain “in Christ” while enjoying our new-found liberty.

So I would warn a parent or a teen that is learning or yearning to remain “in Christ” to watch where you walk, where you stand, and where you sit. Don’t walk “in” the counsel of those who do not love God. Rather, walk “in” the counsel of those who love God.

Don’t stand “in” the way of sinners. Rather, stand “in” the way of the righteous. You can follow this plan for the prosperity of man if you will stand fast “in” your liberty and refuse to wander toward wrong-doers. Why bother with wrong-doers when you can be blessed with right-doers?

And finally, don’t take the position of critical people. That is to say, don’t sit “in” the seat of the scornful. Rather, you should sit “in” the seat of favorable people. I often hear of people who criticize the “power of positive thinking;” but I’d rather enjoy the benefits from the power of positive thinking than experience the weakness of negative thinking!

You will never take that wrong position if you maintain your heavenly disposition, if you recognize that you can’t sit in the chair of a critic, for you are already sitting somewhere. You are seated “in” the heavenlies...not only with Christ Jesus, but you are seated “in Christ.”

When I came back to Christ in 1993, one of the first things I did wrong was try to maintain friendships with those who did not love the Lord. At Reformers Unanimous, we teach in Principle #6 that “those who do not love the Lord will not help you serve the Lord.”

As a returning, wayward child, I did not have any good friends yet, and there were not many people my age in the church. I did not consider being alone an option, so I kept a foot in both puddles, so to speak. I would go to all three services each week and even a singles activity every once in a while. But during the week, and on some weekend evenings, I would hang out with my old friends. I would commit to do right, but was always led to do wrong.

I played on an indoor sand volleyball league with some of these friends. Every Monday evening, after a wonderful day of church, I would head off to the sports arena to play our league games. My goal was to play the game, enjoy my friends, and excuse myself before they went to the club near the back of the courts. Every week, I committed I would not attend the club activities after the games. My friends, who knew I was trying to quit drinking, would compel me to come along by saying, “C’mon! You can just drink soda. It’s no fun without you!”

Remember, now, this was not just their wish, this was their counsel. Week after week, I failed; but week after week, they would counsel me to try it again. This was ungodly counsel, and it stunted my growth for the first three months that I attended church.

I continued to listen to this counsel until I was invited to an all night church activity on New Year’s Eve. At the same time, these old friends had invited me to attend a party with some of them and be their designated driver. I remember them “counseling” me that if I didn’t drive for them, I would leave them in a vulnerable position. I had a decision to make. I chose to follow the leading of the Spirit and attend the all night church activity.

After staying up all night and having an absolute blast with the new friends I was meeting at church, my life was forever changed on my short drive home that New Year’s Day morning.

As I drove to my house weary and worn from an all night fellowship with those who loved God, I was stopped by a red light at a prominent intersection near our church. While waiting at that intersection, I saw my old friends drive through the intersection on their way home from that party. I realized immediately this was not a coincidence. This was a very strong message from God. I listened carefully to what I saw.

On the faces of my friends I could see the misery of a night of ingesting illegal drugs and excessive drinking. They were living “in” sin, and I had spent my evening wonderfully secure “in Christ.” I broke down at that intersection and realized that even though I was going to church and reading my Bible, I was still walking “in” the counsel of the ungodly. That day, I decided

to walk “in” the counsel of the godly and made my preacher, my teachers, my parents, and even my employer - my new “counselors.” Since then, they have never steered me away from Christ. They have helped me remain or re-gain my position “in Christ” with every word of counsel.

My mistake was that, as I began to make new friends in church, I neglected to determine whether they themselves were walking “in” godly counsel or whether they were standing “in Christ.” I was standing “in” the way of sinners by being with them.

As I began to attend functions with the single’s Sunday school class, I started to meet some fine people that were younger than me but close enough to my age to develop new friendships with them. They were in their early twenties, and I was twenty - eight. However, they were an innocent twenty, and I was a very exposed twenty - eight.

It was an exciting time of my life because the things that I used to do, these people would not even consider doing themselves. However, as I look back on it now, I see the sovereignty of God working “in” my life. These young people had never dabbled with the unrighteousness that I had fallen “in” to. However, it was not because these Christian school graduates had remained “in Christ” themselves. Rather, they found perfect happiness with “in” themselves. They were not tempted with unrighteousness, for they had found contentment “in” their self-righteousness.

As a result, these young people were doing many right things, but they were not doing things right; for the right that they did, they did it with “in” their own power. That is self-righteousness. It is doing right—yourself, absent of the power and influence of Christ. When we are self-righteous, we are not abiding “in Him,” we are abiding “in self.” When we abide anywhere but “in Christ,” then we are abiding “in” sin.

Of course, I did not realize this at the time, but God did; and He used my new wise counsel to “walk” me “in” the right direction. You see, sin is not confined to wicked behavior. Sin is wrong behavior. It is any behavior that is not righteous. It is not just that which is right, but that which is righteous. Right is the opposite of wrong. Righteous is when a person becomes right and then does right with “in” His power.

Sin is best defined as a trespass. It literally means to violate a boundary. All freedom is measured by boundaries. We have the freedom of speech “in” the United States. But it is confined with “in” our countries boundaries. It is freedom, yes! But it has to be enjoyed with “in” the limitations of its boundaries.

God has given us all a boundary that determines whether or not we are living our life “in” the selfish sin of self righteousness or living our life “in” the ungodly sin of unrighteousness. That boundary is to be “in Christ.”

These boundaries and what they mean are explained in 2 Corinthians 5:17 where we are taught, once again what it means to be “in Christ” and how to remain there “in.” “Therefore if any man be ‘in Christ,’ he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.”

Many people like to teach that these verses are referring to the elimination of the old man and an introduction of some sort of new man. And to a degree that is not a stretch of the passage. However, it is actually teaching something quite different. It is teaching not only the definition of what it means to be “in Christ” but it is also teaching us how to remain “in Christ.”

When our passage teaches us that old things are passed away, in the verse’s actual context, it is not referring to some sort of aged man being eliminated. It is actually referring to the elimination of the age of the law. When our passage teaches us that all things are become new, it is not introducing a new man; but rather, it is introducing the age of grace.

Herein lies the definition of “in Christ” being taught again. The age of the law was the period in civilization when “man did something for God.” It was literally when man did the work of living right “in” his own power. But the age of grace is the period “in” which we now live. It is the age “in” which “God does something for man.” It is the period of civilization whereby God empowers us to live right “in” His power.

So, this wonderful promise of Christ-like living is teaching us that if we remain with “in” the boundaries of being “in Christ,” that we don’t have to do the work of the Lord “in” our own power. God will do the work for us “in” His power! That’s really good news.

So, when we walk out from underneath the influence of Christ, we are rejecting the boundaries of Christian living that He has placed around us. That means we are sinners. We are trespassing against our boundaries and will no longer remain “in Him,” for we have engaged “in sin.”

This was the position I found myself drifting towards as I re-entered the lifestyle of those with “in” the local church. They didn’t live an unrighteous lifestyle. But it was a self-righteous lifestyle. However, their refusal to engage in unrighteousness was not from a position of conviction, but rather it was from a position of fear. However, it was not the fear of the Lord, it was a fear of man—usually a fear of disappointing their parents.

Now, it is admirable and commanded that we ought to obey our parents. But, we are not to remain “in them,” we are to remain “in Him.” If we remain “in Him,” we will find ourselves also “in them.” But if we are “in them,” we will not necessarily remain “in Him,” at least not “in”ternally.

So, having discarded my friendships with the world, I began to grow quickly in my walk with the Lord. As I slowly developed a deeper walk with Him, I began to see clear evidence of His power on my life. I found myself able to overcome temptations that had before times defeated me consistently. I started to see His Word come alive. It is obvious as I begin to look back now that “all things were [becoming] new.” God’s grace was beginning to do a great work within my life. He was doing things through me that I was unable to accomplish on my own.

However, it didn’t last very long. It seemed the more time I spent with my new self-righteous friends, the more frustrated I became in life. I started to short cut my walk with God. Their apathy became my apathy; and within a few months, I found myself sliding back into my former sins of unrighteousness. Discouraged from being defeated, it was at this time that I seriously considered giving up on God. But God had a plan of protection for me. He wanted me to learn to “abide in Him” not to abide “in them!”

I started to skip church and became distant from those new friends, even hanging out with some of my old friends. I was at a most critical time in my life. One Sunday morning, after daydreaming my way through what was likely going to be one of my last church services, an OLDER man of God came up to me and began to encourage me.

I knew this man from my days in Christian school. He was in high school when I was in grade school. He was the star basketball player, dated a cheerleader, and king of the homecoming court. He was Mr. Popular back in the day. However, fifteen years later, he was still faithful to church, married, and with many godly children. He had never strayed. He was a dynamic Christian, and he took an interest in me.

This was God’s grace taking affect once again. My new friend, Rick, invited me to attend a revival service in Chicago with a few other older men in the church. I really don’t recall much from the actual services that week. However, what I do remember is the way that those godly older Christian men took me under their wing. They spoke of the Lord with great passion. They told jokes and laughed. They were not just good men. They were godly men. They were not just right men. They were righteous men. I sincerely believe that I wouldn’t be where I am today if it were not from my willingness to walk “in” the counsel of my Pastor and to stand “in” the way of Rick Huber and Steve Sheley.

Those young men in my class who struggled with self - righteousness never made it long term. Within ten months, they started falling like flies. Today, not one single of those Christian school kids are in church; much less are they living their life “in Christ.” They may not have ever really been there in a long, long time. Just like me, they took something that they thought was real into a world that was waiting, and they found what they had was not strong enough to do right, long term, in their own power.

So, by the grace of God, I was led to walk “in” the counsel of the godly and rejected the counsel of the ungodly. I was led to stand “in” the way of righteous “be-er’s” and learned to reject the allure of the apathy of self-righteous “do-er’s.”

However, the devil was not done with me; for I had not yet taken my seat. I was walking “in” the right place. I was standing “in” the right place, but it was time to start taking my position “in” some areas. Yet, this is when the devil came at me with another angle to destroy my development “in Christ.”

As I began to gravitate toward the more mature, godly men in our church, I never thought there may be a scorner in the bunch. The more I got involved in the church, the more opportunities came my way for fellowship. I was falling in love with God, my church,

my friends, and my preacher. The Lord was drawing me ever so closer to Him, and I was enjoying longer periods of victory “in Him.”

One day, I was invited to a bowling activity with some of these new friends. I was a bowling partner with a gentleman who had been a member of our church since I was just a little boy. I assumed him to be as godly as the other men that I was enjoying discipling under. However, this man was a critic—a severe critic at that.

In a two hour event, he had slowly but surely accused and critiqued my pastor’s personal life. He led me to believe that our pastor was dishonest and uncaring toward the needs of his sheep. I went home distraught, ready to turn from it all. The one whom I positioned myself under was a hypocrite! Or, so I was taught. The next day was Sunday, and I found myself finding people that I could share my new position with. I had taken the position of a scorner. I was sitting in the very same seat as the man of yesterday. How upset and dedicated I was to make sure this man did not get away with his weaknesses. I heard nothing from his sermon, for my preacher’s influence over me had ended. I was not longer “in Christ,” but I was walking “after my flesh.” You can walk after the flesh or walk in the Spirit, but you cannot do both simultaneously.

But, God’s grace was sufficient. His sovereignty was supreme. Within two weeks of feeling quite frustrated and angry, I knew that I was becoming vulnerable again to my unrighteousness. I was not smart enough to put two and two together. So, God got involved and did a little math for me. Why did He do it? It was because all things were becoming new. The great grace of our God and Savior was at work in my life.

After two weeks of meditating on a critical, negative, pessimistic view of my preacher and my church, I was met with what was true, honest, and just. I went up to the church on a Monday night for a gym night with some other former “schoolers.” As I drove around looking for a parking spot, I found myself driving up and around the bus barn. When I went to turn around, I looked into my rear view mirror and I saw that scorner from weeks earlier was standing on the side of the building smoking a cigarette. All of a sudden, a great conviction came over me.

I was struck in my spirit that I had sinned against God, my church, and my great counselor—my pastor. I did not realize this because a man that I thought was godly was smoking—for at this time, I was still struggling with smoking myself. The conviction came from the realization that I was being “in”fluenced by a man with the same sinful struggles that I had and rather than him being able to help me with my struggles, he was actually “in”fluencing me with his own struggle—a bitter, critical, negative, and pessimistic attitude toward the authority within his own umbrella of protection.

I quietly rejected this man and ended our developing friendship. I confessed my sin to my pastor and sought his forgiveness. I spoke no more evil against him and found myself soon returning to my position “in Christ.” It was shortly thereafter, that I met my future wife, Lori. Lori was absolutely, unequivocally the most “un”critical person that I had ever met. Over the course of our dating relationship, I never heard one negative word spoken about one single person. When I would see a flaw in someone, as I had learned to do often “in” the world, she would often defend that person and give me the optimistic view of my pessimistic perception. More often than not, I found that I would soon “assume” her position on the matter. I was learning how to sit “in” the seat of the up-lifter. What a difference her positive attitude has made in my life.

You do not only find yourself “in sin” when you reject the church and embrace unrighteousness, but you also find yourself “in sin” when you reject the Spirit and embrace self-righteousness. Just because you go to church does not mean that you have avoided walking “in” the counsel of the ungodly. It does not mean you have successfully stayed away from standing “in” way of sinners. It does not mean that you have rejected your opportunities to sit “in” the seat of the scornful. For the devil has learned to “in”fluence those with “in” the body of Christ to step out from underneath their position “in Christ.” Over the course of the next ten years of my life, I learned many great things about God and about his good people—the local church. But the most important and productive decision that I have ever made was to become an “Umbrella Fella.”

The day I chose to place all my large decisions and a great number of my smaller (but important) decisions at the feet of my preacher, teachers, parents, employer, and the laws of government to have the rule over me, forever turned my life toward a positive direction.

I went from a position of homeless drug addict, to a married father of five. I went from being unemployed to an executive position in the oil business. I went from a sinner unable to sing in the choir because of my stubborn habits to the founder of an international addiction program with thousands of wonderful converts being set free from captivity. Was this because I learned how to “do

right”? No, it was because I was learning how to “be right”; I was learning how to live my life “in Christ.”

I was becoming an “Umbrella Fella”;and whenever God is looking for obedient children to “rain” down His blessings, those blessings always rain harder on the fella that is under His umbrella and his life will be prosperous. I am truly happy and blessed because I have chosen to follow God’s formula as outlined in Psalm One. I have become a Psalm One Christian...RU?