

The Alphabet of Knowing Christ Personally

KEY VERSE: *For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.* John 3:16

Salvation is one of the most marvelous subjects in all of the Word of God! It is ocean-like, with great depth and breadth. The wonders of God's saving grace cannot be fully explained or understood. Although preachers throughout the centuries have attempted to expound on the depths of John 3:16, they have never reached the ocean floor of God's love. We can know Christ for decades and still not completely comprehend the greatness of His love for us. This depth is one reason that the Christian life never grows old or dull. We can always go wider, farther, deeper and higher in our understanding of Christ's love for us. The Apostle Paul prayed to that end for the saints in Ephesus: *That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God* (Ephesians 3:17-19).

Speaking of oceans, the Prophet Jonah found himself on the storm-tossed Mediterranean Sea, bound for Tarshish. In fleeing from God, he disobeyedly

headed in the opposite direction of Nineveh, the city to which God had sent him. This dramatic story is recorded for us in Jonah 1. Verse 17 says, *Now the LORD had prepared a great fish to swallow up Jonah. And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights.* From the dark dungeon of this whale's belly, Jonah cried out to God. He concluded his prayer with worship: *But I will sacrifice unto thee with the voice of thanksgiving; I will pay that which I have vowed. Salvation is of the Lord* (Jonah 2:9). Yes, salvation is of the Lord. The false religionists of the world insist that you must "do." Biblical Christianity, however, triumphantly cries, "Done!" Jonah was saved physically by a direct act of God. God prepared a great fish (a whale according to Matthew 12:40) to swallow Jonah and to deposit him safely back on shore. We are saved spiritually and eternally by a direct act of God. He prepared a Savior to rescue us from the sea of sin.

You may be asking, "What exactly is salvation anyway? How is it obtained? How is one born again?" This biblical alphabet answers these questions and many more. Many doctrines are combined in this one broad subject of salvation—doctrines such as redemption, propitiation, reconciliation, atonement, adoption, justification, and regeneration. These and other terms will be explained and illustrated.

Salvation is the...

Adoption of the sinner into the family of God.

To redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons. Galatians 4:5

Danny and Kristen Lowery delighted our family in December of 2006, when they traveled across the Atlantic Ocean to an orphanage in Ethiopia and had the thrill of holding their five-month-old son for the first time. Through the wonderful process of adoption, Caleb Daniel Eyobel (his Ethiopian name) is now officially a Lowery. Did you know that every true Christian has been adopted into God's family?!

Many have the biblically uninformed opinion that everyone on earth is a child of God. This liberal theological view supports the Fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of humanity and even goes so far as to say that all people, regardless of their degree of sinfulness or their religion (or lack thereof), will go to heaven. This view, of course, is false. We are all God's creation, but we only become His children by being born into His family. Letter **B** will deal with the fact that we must have a second birth if we ever hope to see or enter the kingdom of God.

In John 14:6, Christ emphatically declared, *I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.* In His famous Sermon on the Mount, Jesus clearly proclaimed, *Enter ye in at the strait gate: for*

wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it (Matthew 7:13, 14). These words (and verses like Acts 4:12) do not indicate that all men are heaven-bound! Also in Matthew 7, Christ said, Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity (Matthew 7:21-23).

Romans 8:15 asserts, *For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father.* We were not born into God's family when we were born into this world; therefore, we have been adopted into God's family (Ephesians 3:14, 15) by the wonderful grace of God (Ephesians 2:8, 9) and through the regenerating power of God's Spirit (Titus 3:5). Now that we are adopted, we can cry, "Abba, Father." What a thrill, blessing, privilege, and great responsibility we have to be the adopted children of God. We can relate to the emotion that Mephibosheth must have felt when he was welcomed into the palace of King David. Saul, throughout 1 Samuel, had made many attempts on David's life. Jonathan (Saul's son) and David were best of friends. The book of 2 Samuel begins with David mourning the deaths of Saul and Jonathan after their

deaths in a military battle. Now, David wants to show kindness to a descendent of Jonathan. *And the king said, Is there not yet any of the house of Saul, that I may shew the kindness of God unto him? And Ziba said unto the king, Jonathan hath yet a son, which is lame on his feet (2 Samuel 9:3).* Mephibosheth was the grandson of David's mortal enemy, but now he is treated as one of David's sons. *Then the king called to Ziba, Saul's servant, and said unto him, I have given unto thy master's son all that pertained to Saul and to all his house. Then said Ziba unto the king, According to all that my lord the king hath commanded his servant, so shall thy servant do. As for Mephibosheth, said the king, he shall eat at my table, as one of the king's sons (2 Samuel 9:9 and 11).*

Salvation is a...

***B*irth from heaven.**

Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. John 3:3

Our first birth is of man and puts us into the family of Satan (John 8:44), but the new (or second) birth is of God and places us into the family of God (John 1:12, 13). The new birth is an event, not a process. Just as we were all born on certain days, so we are born again the day we receive Christ by faith. John 1:11-13 says, *He came unto his own, and his own received*

him not. But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name: which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.

We may not remember the exact date and time of our new birth, but we should remember that the Savior entered our lives at a specific time. We should also remember some of the circumstances surrounding that event. According to 1 Peter 1:23, the *incorruptible seed* of this new birth is the Word of God. The life-giving (regenerating) power is the Holy Spirit (John 3:6; Titus 3:5). We are spiritually dead before we are saved. God's Spirit actually brings us to life! We are made alive in Christ after believing in Him. *And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins; (Ephesians 2:1).*

A dialogue between Christ and Nicodemus, a religious leader of his day, extends from John 3:1 all the way to John 3:21. Not only did Nicodemus have the unique privilege of being the first to hear about the new birth, but he was also the one who first heard the wonderful words of John 3:16. This twenty-one verse conversation does not clearly state that Nicodemus trusted in Christ that night, but the following verses give us an indication that he probably did believe on Christ at some point: *And after this Joseph of Arimathaea, being a disciple of Jesus, but secretly for fear of the Jews, besought Pilate that he might take away the body of Jesus: and Pilate gave him leave. He came therefore, and took the body of Jesus. **And there came also Nicodemus, which at the first came to Jesus by night, and brought a mixture of***

myrrh and aloes, about an hundred pound weight. Then took they the body of Jesus, and wound it in linen clothes with the spices, as the manner of the Jews is to bury. Now in the place where he was crucified there was a garden; and in the garden a new sepulchre, wherein was never man yet laid. There laid they Jesus therefore because of the Jews' preparation day; for the sepulchre was nigh at hand (John 19:38-42, emphasis mine).

Too often the religious feel that they have always been Christians, but God's Word teaches that we **become** the children of God when we receive Christ (John 1:12). I became Donna Smith's husband on April 22, 1972, at the Bible Baptist Church of Corinth, Mississippi, at four o'clock on a sunny Saturday afternoon. I was not always her husband, and my friend, you have not always been God's child. As Christ so clearly stated, *Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again* (John 3:7).

My sincere prayer is that you have been born again, and if not, I pray that God's Holy Spirit will reveal that to you.

SUMMARY

Salvation is the ...

Adoption of the sinner into the family of God (Galatians 4:5).

Salvation is a ...

Birth from heaven (John 3:3).

Salvation is the ...

Cleansing of sin with Christ's blood (1 John 1:7).

Salvation is the ...

Deliverance from the penalty of sin
(2 Corinthians 1:10).

Salvation is ...

Eternal in its source and duration (John 5:24).

Salvation is the ...

Forgiveness of every past and present sin
(Psalm 51:1, 2).

Salvation is the ...

Gift of God accepted freely (Ephesians 2:8, 9).

Salvation is a ...

Heart response to the Word of God
(Romans 10:9, 10).

Salvation is . . .

Immortality and life brought to light through the
gospel (2 Timothy 1:10).

Salvation is ...

Justification before God of the unjust sinner
(Romans 5:1).

Salvation is ...

Kissing the Son (Psalm 2:12).

Salvation is ...

Love brought down to man (2 Corinthians 8:9).

Salvation is the ...

Mercy of God extended to hell-deserving sinners
(1 Timothy 1:12, 13).

Salvation is ...

Narrow in its way (Matthew 7:13, 14).

Salvation is the ...

Operation of God (Colossians 2:12).

Salvation is ...

Peace with God (Ephesians 2:13, 14).

Salvation is a ...

Quenching of the thirsty soul (John 4:14).

Salvation is the ...

Redemption of God's lost possession (Ephesians 1:7).

Salvation is ...

Sight from God (2 Corinthians 4:4, 6).

Salvation is a ...

Transformation of the life (2 Corinthians 5:17).

Salvation is a ...

Unity with God and fellow believers
(Ephesians 2:18, 19).

Salvation is the ...

Vengeance of God appeased (Romans 5:9).

Salvation is a ...

Wedding with Christ (2 Corinthians 11:2).

Salvation is an ...

EXperience, not a process (Luke 23:43).

Salvation is the ...

Yielding of self to God (Acts 9:6a).

Salvation adds ...

Zest to life (John 10:10).

The Alphabet of Having Assurance of Salvation

KEY VERSE: *Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ: Philippians 1:6*

This alphabet deals with the following question: “Can I really know for sure that I am going to heaven when I die?” The answer is, of course, a resounding yes! In this alphabet you will see how that confidence can be yours. God saves and keeps.

I personally struggled with the assurance of my salvation for some time because I was not properly disciplined. I was saved in April of 1963, at the age of fourteen, while attending an evangelistic youth conference on the campus of Taylor University in Upland, Indiana. My cousin, Judy Beers, was attending Taylor and had gone there from a Baptist church. Our family went to a liberal Protestant church where we heard no Bible doctrine. A college student at Taylor (who prayed with me as I accepted Christ) wrote me one follow-up letter telling me to pray, read my Bible, and go to church. The only problem was that I needed someone to teach me how to pray and how to study the Bible. I also needed a good Bible-believing church to attend so I could grow in my new-found faith.

I was a teenager in the time of Beatlemania. In fact, the first song I learned on the guitar was a Beatles’

song, and my teen years were taken over by rock music. Christ had entered my heart, but I was living a self-centered, carnal life. My backsliding grew worse all throughout my high school years. Through a providential chain of events too long to detail here, my sister, Dianne, went to Bob Jones University the second semester of my junior year. She came home that summer a different person. During spring break of my senior year, I was flown down to the campus of BJU in Greenville, South Carolina, thanks to the generosity of one of Dianne's roommates. During those five days on that wonderful Christian college campus, I got right with the Lord, determined to start living for Jesus Christ, and decided that Bob Jones University was the place God had for me to acquire my training. Not until the end of October, 1966 (my freshman year at BJU), however, did I gain assurance of salvation. A spiritually grounded upperclassman took the Scriptures and showed me verses like John 10:27-29 and 1 John 5:12 and 13. I claimed the truth of those and other verses and knew that I had been given eternal life three years earlier in April of 1963. I finally had assurance.

My purposes in writing this alphabet are to bring help to those who are struggling with this matter of assurance of salvation, to give Christians strong biblical grounds for their eternal security, and to bring rejoicing to the hearts of believers over the fact that their names are written in heaven with permanent ink! This alphabet will also answer the question, "Can believers lose their salvation?" This alphabet deals with

the assurance of salvation from two points of view: from God's promises, power, love, and grace; and from fruits of salvation that will be evident in the life of a person who has experienced a genuine new birth.

Genuine is a key word. Many profess Christ, but far fewer possess Christ. The Lord Jesus warned in Matthew 7:21-23: *Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity.* You can hit a home run but can be called "out" at home plate if you did not touch first base. First base in the Christian life is not being baptized or going to church or tithing—first base is seeing yourself as a sinner under God's judgment, turning to Jesus Christ in faith as your Savior from sin and hell, and receiving His gift of eternal life. My friend, make sure that you have made it to first base before you start advancing to the other bases in the Christian life. The Apostle Paul warned the Corinthian church in this area: *Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves. Know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates?* (2 Corinthians 13:5). Are you *in the faith*? Is Jesus Christ *in you*? The following alphabetized points are not only given to confirm assurance of salvation, but also to challenge whether or not genuine salvation has taken place.

Works have no part in a person being saved (Ephesians 2:8, 9; Titus 3:5), but good works confirm true salvation. Look at the context of that classic text in Ephesians 2: 8 and 9. Ephesians 2:10 says, *For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.* We see this exact same sequence repeated in Titus. Titus 3:5-7 forms one wonderful sentence on the truth of salvation apart from works: *Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost; which he shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour; that being justified by his grace, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life.* Yes, we are justified by grace in the eyes of God, but now note Titus 3:8: *This is a faithful saying, and these things I will that thou affirm constantly, that they which have believed in God might be careful to maintain good works. These things are good and profitable unto men.* We are justified in the eyes of men by our works since that is all they can see. Faith works as James 2:14-26 so wonderfully teaches. Make sure that yours is a living faith and not a dead faith! May you put your faith to work and grow in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Security means having. . .

Assurance in the heart.

For the which cause I also suffer these things: nevertheless I am not ashamed: for I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day. 2 Timothy 1:12

The Bible tells us that we can know we are going to heaven (1 John 5:13). Our eternal salvation is firmly backed up by the eternal Word of God (Matthew 24:35) and by the abiding presence of the Spirit of God (Romans 8:9-16). We believe with the heart, and we can have assurance in our hearts.

We must always keep our focus on God and His power. Paul, in his wonderful testimony in 2 Timothy 1:12, was writing from prison when his death was imminent. In fact, listen to his words in 2 Timothy 4:6: *For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand.* He was about to be beheaded for his faith in Christ! How could he have such a calm spirit in the face of such a gruesome death? We find the answer to that question in 2 Timothy 1:12. Paul said he trusted Christ...*to keep that which [he had] committed unto him.* Two words here need defining. The Greek word for *keep* carries the idea “to watch or to guard” and *commit* here refers to “a deposit, a trust or a thing consigned to one’s faithful keeping” (*Strong’s Concordance*). Let me give you a word picture. Think of Jesus Christ as our Divine Security Guard. We give our

eternal soul over to His safekeeping, and He stands watch, keeping the deposit of our souls eternally secure. Our souls are safer in His hands than is all the gold at Fort Knox!

Paul was not ashamed of the wonderful Lord in whom he believed. He was absolutely persuaded, beyond any shadow of a doubt, that Christ was able to keep his soul secure in His hand until the day that Paul would stand in his Savior's very presence.

You do not have to be near death to experience this sweet assurance of salvation. Fanny Crosby, the godly blind poet who wrote the lyrics to thousands of gospel songs, put it this way:

Blessed Assurance, Jesus is mine!
O what a foretaste of glory divine!
Heir of salvation, purchase of God,
Born of His Spirit, washed in His blood.

This is my story, this is my song,
Praising my Savior all the day long;
This is my story, this is my song,
Praising my Savior all the day long.

Security means having. . .

Belief in the promises of God.

He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God; and being fully persuaded that, what he had promised, he was able also to perform. Romans 4:20, 21

When God makes a promise, He keeps it! If God were to break one of His promises, He would be a liar. Titus tells us that it is impossible for God to lie (Titus 1:2); therefore, when God promises eternal life to those who trust Christ (1 John 2:25; Hebrews 10:23), we can count on His word.

Abraham was promised a child by the Lord. Even though he was 100 years of age and his wife Sarah was 90, he knew God would keep His promise. Though at different times both Abraham (Genesis 17:17) and Sarah laughed (Genesis 18:12) in disbelief, the promise was repeated often enough that Abraham's faith was made strong. (As a side note, *Isaac*, the name of the child born to them so late in life, means "laughter.")

We need to *stagger not at the promises of God* through our unbelief and need to be fully persuaded that God is abundantly able to perform what He promises.

The longer a true child of God has been saved, the more he or she knows that God's promises can be trusted. Christian maturity is growing in faith in Christ and His Word. It would be wise for you to keep a journal that would record the dates and details of God keeping His promises in your life. The story is told of a new believer looking through the Bible of an older saint of God who had walked with the Lord for decades. As this younger Christian leafed through the pages, he saw capital **T's** and **P's** in the margins on many pages of this well-worn Bible. He just had to ask, "I am so curious, why have you written these two letters in the pages of your Bible, and what do these

letters mean?" The godly Christian replied, "For years now I have been putting God's promises to the test. When I am trusting and waiting upon God to fulfill a promise I see in the Bible, I put a **T** next to the verse. The **T** stands for 'tested.' When God comes through on that promise, as He always has, I put a **P** next to the **T** to show that the Lord has 'proven' His promise to me once again." The new believer kept scanning the tattered pages and saw hundreds of **T**'s and **P**'s next to verses all through the Bible. My friend, in time you will learn more and more to put your faith in a faithful, trustworthy God.

There is an awesome truth found in 1 Kings 8:54-56: *And it was so, that when Solomon had made an end of praying all this prayer and supplication unto the LORD, he arose from before the altar of the LORD, from kneeling on his knees with his hands spread up to heaven. And he stood, and blessed all the congregation of Israel with a loud voice, saying, Blessed be the LORD, that hath given rest unto his people Israel, according to all that he promised: **there hath not failed one word of all his good promise, which he promised by the hand of Moses his servant** (emphasis mine).*

Summary

The purpose of this summary is to help the reader review the material studied and reflect on each alphabetized point. Memorizing the points with the references is somewhat easier because of the alphabetical sequence. I recommend that you use 3 x 5

cards to write the alphabetized points on one side with the references and then write out the verse(s) on the reverse side of the cards. This will give you twenty-six doctrinally sound points tucked away in your memory, along with the thirty-one verses that support these scriptural truths. Memorization is an important aspect of the Christian growth process!

Security means having...

Assurance in the heart (2 Timothy 1:12).

Security means having...

Belief in the promises of God (Romans 4:20, 21).

Security means having...

Confidence in the keeping power of God
(1 Peter 1:5).

Security means having...

Discipline in the life (Hebrews 12:6).

Security means having...

Edification in the life (Ephesians 4:12).

Security means having...

Fruit in Christ (Matthew 7:17, 18).

Security means being in the...

Grip of Christ and the Father (John 10:28, 29).

Security means having...

Holiness in the sight of God (Hebrews 12:14).

Security means that...

Intercession in heaven is being made on our behalf
(Hebrews 7:25).

Security means having...

Joy in the Holy Spirit (1 Peter 1:8, 9).

Security means that our...

Keeper in the times of temptation is God Himself
(John 17:15).

Security is evidenced by...

Love in the heart for brothers and sisters in Christ
(John 13:35).

Security means that the...

Memory of God will not forget His own (Isaiah
49:15, 16).

Security means having our...

Names in the Book of Life (Revelation 20:15).

Security is evidenced by...

Obedience in the life to God's commands
(1 John 2:3).

Security means having a...

Pledge in writing of our salvation (1 John 5:13).

Security means having...

Quietness in the soul (Isaiah 32:17).

Security means that...

Reservations in heaven have been made for us
(1 Peter 1:4).

Security means having the...

Seal of the Holy Spirit in salvation
(Ephesians 4:30).

Security means that...

Trials in life are sent, or allowed, by God
(1 Peter 1:7).

Security is based on...

Unchangeableness in the character of God

(Malachi 3:6).

Security is evidenced by...

Victory in overcoming the world and the grave

(1 Corinthians 15:57).

Security is having a...

Witness in the believer's spirit from God's Holy

Spirit as to the veracity of salvation (Romans 8:16).

Security enjoys the...

Experience of God's love in all of life's circumstances

(Romans 8:28).

Security is having a...

Yearning in the heart to be in heaven with Jesus

Christ (2 Corinthians 5:2).

Security means having...

Zeal in the Spirit for good works (Titus 2:14).

The Alphabet of Growing in Christ

KEY VERSE: But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.

2 Corinthians 3:18

In 2 Corinthians 3, Paul shared the account of Moses receiving the Decalogue (the Ten Commandments) directly from God on Mount Sinai. This great emancipator's face was glowing so brightly from being in the presence of God that he had to place a veil over it when he rejoined the Israelites at the foot of the mountain. In our key verse above the phrase, *with open face*, refers to the previous verses (13-16) which cite a veil blinding the minds of unregenerate Jews. Through the power of Christ, that veil can be lifted from blinded minds (2 Corinthians 3:14).

The next chapter, written to the ethnically diverse church of Corinth, talks about being blinded by *the god of this world* and the power that *the light of the glorious gospel of Christ* has to break through that darkness (2 Corinthians 4:4). Now we can look without restraint into the unclouded glass or mirror of God's Word and see Christ in all of His fullness. As we continue to fix our eyes upon Christ (Hebrews 12:2) and study God's Word (2 Timothy 2:15), we are changed into His image *from glory to glory* in wonderful, gradual, transforming degrees. The Spirit of

God is the Person performing these changes in our lives!

When arranging this book in a sequential order that would move logically from topic to topic, I chose, of course, to start with salvation in "The Alphabet of Knowing Christ Personally." After salvation, believers need to gain an understanding of assurance of salvation, so I followed with "The Alphabet of Having Assurance of Salvation." After understanding our security in Christ, we must move on to lives of growth in Him. The doctrine of sanctification deals with Christian growth. Thus, this third chapter is "The Alphabet of Growing in Christ." This topic of growing in Christ covers a wide spectrum of scriptural concepts. In this chapter, we will look at twenty-six nouns arranged in alphabetical order. These concepts traverse this spectrum of sanctification. All twenty-six words are different aspects of growing in Christ. Before commencing with this alphabet, though, I want to give a brief overview of the biblical truth of sanctification.

Sanctification speaks of holiness of life and of a setting apart of the believer's life to God and to His use. Jude 1:1 tells us that God the Father sanctifies us. First Corinthians 6:11 tells us that we are washed, sanctified, and justified *in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God*. This separation by all three members of the Godhead takes place at the moment of salvation and is known as "positional sanctification." Another aspect of sanctification is "progressive sanctification" or "practical sanctification." Christian growth involves the cleansing of life from sinful

impurities, the putting off of sinful patterns of life, and the putting on of the new man (Ephesians 4:22-24). This lifetime process of replacement has as its goal advancement in Christ-likeness and involves adding Christ-like, godly virtues to our lives (2 Peter 1:5-8).

Just before Peter charged believers to diligently add seven virtues to their faith, he revealed that believers have all the resources necessary to live the Christian life: *Grace and peace be multiplied unto you through the knowledge of God, and of Jesus our Lord, according as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue: whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust* (2 Peter 1:2-4, emphasis mine). This one well-crafted sentence is weighty with truths about sanctification.

Selecting a key verse for this topic was difficult because of the many great verses from which to choose. Two other passages are fundamental to a better understanding of progressive sanctification. Second Peter 3:18 commands, *But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and for ever. Amen.* Philippians 2:12 and 13 teach, *Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure.* Peter's admonition to

grow is not a subtle suggestion but a clear command to be obeyed by all who name the name of Christ. The second passage shows both **our part** (*work out your own salvation with fear and trembling*) and **God's part** (*for it is God which worketh in you*) in this process we call progressive sanctification. Philippians 2:12 does not teach that we *work for* salvation. Instead, Paul plainly states that we *work out* the salvation that we already possess. You cannot *work out* what has not already been *worked in* by God's grace. We should all tremble in His holy presence as we strive to glorify Him and please Him (Hebrews 12:28, 29). Do not be overwhelmed in this daily, disciplined exercise of godliness (1 Timothy 4:7, 8) because God is also working in you, and He will never give up on you (Philippians 1:6). Sanctification is work, my friend, but it is a good work worth every amount of effort that you invest. *That ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God;* (Colossians 1:10). When God commands us to do things that are in accordance with His plan, He also enables us and gives us His ongoing grace. *And God is able to make all grace abound toward you; that ye, always having all sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work:* (2 Corinthians 9:8).

Sanctification is having...

Assurance.

Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water. Hebrews 10:22

The writer of Hebrews used some comparisons that the Jewish Christians of his day would easily understand. Hebrews 10:19-21 victoriously tell us of Jesus, our great High Priest, providing *a new and living way* for us to enter boldly into the holiest. That way is through His blood. Think of that day on Calvary when the veil was ripped from the top to the bottom for you (Matthew 27:51)!

Assurance is a calmness of heart implanted by the Spirit of God and the Word of God (Romans 8:16; 1 John 5:13). This tranquil assurance testifies to Christians that they are saved and will go to heaven when they die. A new Christian will find growth difficult until this matter is settled! Satan is the author of doubts. Remember what he said to Eve? *Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden* (Genesis 3:1b)? In the same way, Satan will try to place doubts in the believer's heart and mind concerning the Word of God. Fall in love with God's Word (Psalm 119:97), meditate upon it (Joshua 1:8; Psalm 1:1-3), and allow the Holy Spirit to erase the doubts Satan implants in your mind. *So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God* (Romans 10:17). If you

are having any struggles in this area, review “The Alphabet of Having Assurance of Salvation” and contact a capable, Bible-believing man of God in your area for assistance.

If you truly know Christ, you can draw near to His presence with a *true heart in full assurance of faith*. The relationship we have with God stimulates us toward an even deeper, more meaningful relationship with Him as we grow in Christ-likeness.

Do not let Satan fill your mind with doubt, guilt, and regret over things you have done in the past. I saw the following on the back of a young man’s T-shirt: “The next time Satan reminds you of your past, remind him of his future.” (See Revelation 20:10) Do not allow yourself to be dominated by your feelings. If we were to base our assurance on our fickle feelings, we would all be in big trouble. May your faith in His work on Calvary be your strong confidence.

Sanctification is submitting to...

Baptism.

Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen. Matthew 28:19, 20

Baptism is the believer's immersion in water in obedience to Christ's command. Colossians 2:12a tells us that we are *buried with him in baptism*. Our English word *baptize* comes from a Greek word, $\beta\alpha\upsilon\tau\iota\zeta\omicron$ / *bap-tid'-zo*, which means "to dip repeatedly, to immerse, to submerge" (*On-Line Greek Lexicon*).

When Donna and I first moved to Queens in 1974, we lived on a block of ten attached row houses, each with three floors. About twenty-five of the thirty families on our street were Greek. We had our church sign leaning up against our wrought iron fence and secured with a chain. Before long, our neighbors all learned that I was the pastor of the new Baptist church meeting in the basement there at 51-12 111th Street. One day I asked an elderly Greek neighbor to give me the meaning of $\beta\alpha\upsilon\tau\iota\zeta\omicron$. With his heavy Greek accent, he answered, "You know, like jumping off the diving board into the swimming pool. You go all the way under the water. That's $\beta\alpha\upsilon\tau\iota\zeta\omicron$!"

Baptism by immersion is a beautiful picture of the death (standing in the water), burial (being put down under the water), and resurrection of Christ (coming up out of the water). Baptism also shows the believer's "death, burial, and resurrection" to walk in newness of life (Romans 6:1-6). Though baptism has sometimes been confused with salvation, Scripture does not teach that doctrine. Baptism is not a part of salvation, but follows after salvation as a badge of identification with the person of Christ and with other

true believers. Because water baptism is an ordinance given to the local church, believers should be baptized through and into local churches. Believers should obey the command to be baptized. In fact, this should be one of the first steps of obedience a believer takes. Those who do not obey this command will more easily overlook and discard Christ's other commands.

Acts contains a history of the early church. In this book, people were baptized immediately after salvation (Acts 2:41; 8:12, 36-38; 10:47, 48; 16:14, 15 and 33; 18:8). The only delay in Acts between salvation and baptism occurred in the account of Saul of Tarsus (later named Paul the Apostle). Even then, only three days passed (Acts 9:9-18). A church should train new converts in the significance and symbolism of baptism but should carry baptism out as promptly as possible. One strong indication of God's hand of blessing on an evangelistic church is a well-used baptismal tank.

Another strong conclusion that we can draw from the early church is that in no place in the book of Acts do we see infants being baptized. The early church baptized only those who were old enough to repent of their sins and believe upon the Lord Jesus Christ. Many denominations baptize babies, but this type of baptism is not the practice or teaching of the New Testament. The argument is that babies are born with original sin (a truth found in Psalm 51:5) and that they need to have that sin washed away with the sacrament or rite of baptism. The problem with that reasoning, however, is that no water, no matter how many prayers are said over it, can cleanse or take away

sin. (See letter **C** of “The Alphabet of Knowing Christ Personally.”) Only the blood of Christ applied to the heart of the repenting, trusting sinner can cleanse of sin (Ephesians 1:7). While millions of people go through life sincerely thinking they are saved because they were baptized as infants, they are sincerely wrong! Proverbs 16:25 warns, *There is a way that seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death.*

If you have recently turned to Christ, follow Him in believer’s baptism. You might say, “But, Brother Lowery, I was baptized as an infant!” I know that believer’s baptism is an immense change from what you were taught, but an infant baptism experience was not a baptism in the true sense of the teaching of God’s Word. Let me summarize. True biblical baptism comes after an individual has trusted Christ as Savior. This baptism is immersion in water to portray Christ’s death, burial, and resurrection and is an act of obedience, not a rite or sacrament of cleansing. Baptism places a believer within the fellowship of a local, called-out assembly of other believers. I admonish you to obey God’s command. Baptism will be a great step on the path of obedience and blessing.

SUMMARY

Continually go over this list of twenty-six items that go together to bring about our sanctification. Please do not think that this alphabetized list is a complete list of every ingredient in the process of

sanctification! If some of these things are missing from your life, ask God to give them to you (1 John 5:14,15).

“FOR THIS IS THE WILL OF GOD, EVEN YOUR SANCTIFICATION...” 1 Thessalonians 4:3a

Sanctification is having...

Assurance – Hebrews 10:22

Sanctification is submitting to...

Baptism – Matthew 28:19,20

Sanctification is striving for...

Conformity – Romans 8:29

Sanctification is showing...

Dedication – Romans 12:1

Sanctification is focusing on...

Edification – 1 Thessalonians 5:11

Sanctification is developing...

Faithfulness – Galatians 6:9

Sanctification is learning to be a...

Giver – Acts 20:35

Sanctification is desiring...

Holiness – 2 Corinthians 7:1

Sanctification is practicing...

Intercession – 1 Timothy 2:1,2

Sanctification is exercising...

Judgment – 1 Corinthians 11:31,32

Sanctification is enjoying...

Kinship – Colossians 2:2

Sanctification is volunteering as a...

Laborer – 1 Corinthians 3:9

Sanctification is expanding your...

Memory – Psalm 119:16

Sanctification is hungering for...

Nourishment – Job 23:12

Sanctification is giving yourself to...

Obedience – John 14:15

Sanctification is prioritizing...

Prayerfulness – 1 Thessalonians 5:17

Sanctification is seeking...

Quietness – Isaiah 30:15

Sanctification is running a...

Race – 1 Corinthians 9:24

Sanctification is committing yourself to...

Soulwinning – Matthew 4:19

Sanctification is wanting to be a...

Testimony – 2 Corinthians 3:2

Sanctification is working for...

Unity – Psalm 133:1

Sanctification is being an honorable...

Vessel – 2 Corinthians 4:7

Sanctification is continuing in...

Watchfulness – 1 Peter 5:8

Sanctification is displaying...

EXcitement – Colossians 3:23

Sanctification is yielding to a...

Yoke – Matthew 11:29, 30

Sanctification is burning with holy...

Zeal – Luke 24:32

The Alphabet of Overcoming Temptation

KEY VERSE: *There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it.*

1 Corinthians 10:13

This alphabet is designed to help Christians overcome their three enemies: the world, the flesh, and the Devil. Our key verse tells us that God will always provide a way of escape when temptation becomes too strong for the believer to bear. Christians simply need to learn to take God's exits. This alphabet will aid you in your striving for sanctification. Remember, God never tempts us to do evil (James 1:13); but, He is always there to give grace to overcome temptation.

"The Alphabet of Overcoming Temptation" is different than the other alphabets in this book because I have taken the liberty to expand this alphabet. Here you will find thirty-two different scriptural ways to avoid and conquer temptation. We can never say, "The Devil made me do it!" We sin because we yield to temptation. No one is holding a gun to our heads forcing us to sin!

Scripture records the temptation of Christ in Matthew 4:1-11. The Son of God overcame a face-to-face encounter with the wiles and fiery darts of Satan. He was tempted three times and triumphed three times because He answered all three temptations by quoting verses from the Old Testament. Satan's three temptations corresponded to the words of the Apostle John in 1 John 2:16: *For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world.* Satan will do all he can to use the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life to lure you into his many traps. He has been using the same tactics since the Garden of Eden. Eve yielded in all three areas, as we read in Genesis 3:6: *And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat.*

Christian friend, whether you have been saved a month, twenty years or fifty years, you are always going to face the battle with temptation! May God use these thirty-two exits from the room of temptation to give you the ways of escape and ammunition you need in this fierce battle. It is vital for you to know that the Spirit of God can give you victory over temptation. Do not have a defeatist attitude. We can yield to temptation, or we can yield to God (Romans 6:13). Claim the fact that your God will always be faithful to you in your hour of temptation, and claim the promise that He will always provide a way to escape.

Overcoming temptation is possible when you...

Abstain from every appearance of evil.

Abstain from all appearance of evil. 1 Thessalonians 5:22

If the Christian is to experience victory over temptation, he must be able to discern good from evil (Hebrews 5:12-14). The memory verse for letter **A** emphasizes staying away from that which even looks like it would be sin. Do not have a careless attitude toward sin. The overcoming Christian cannot be too cautious and careful with something as harmful as sin. This separation from evil will cause the Christian to *rejoice evermore* (1 Thessalonians 5:16). As we keep ourselves from that which smells of sin, we also need to *pray without ceasing* (1 Thessalonians 5:17). By abstaining from evil, we will be obeying Paul's admonition to *quench not the Spirit* (1 Thessalonians 5:19).

How can we know what is evil and what is good if it is not clearly named as such in the Bible? In this same chapter, verse twenty-one tells us to—*Prove all things; hold fast that which is good.* Ephesians 5:10 restates this truth: *Proving (testing) what is acceptable to the Lord.* Romans 14 is one of the best chapters in the New Testament for finding principles of testing right from wrong. From this chapter, the following five questions could be asked to test whether something or someplace would be right for you to do or to go:

1. Would I cause my Christian brother to stumble by doing this thing or going to this place (vs. 7, 13, 21)?
2. Could I do this thing or go to this place *as unto the Lord*—or for His glory (v. 8; 1 Corinthians 10:31)?
3. Will I be ashamed of doing this thing or going to this place when I stand before Christ to give an account of my life as a Christian (vs. 10-12; 1 John 2:28-3:3)?
4. Would this thing or this place bring peace and edification to myself and others, or spiritual disorder and destruction (v. 19)?
5. Would my conscience be clear if I did this thing or went to this place (v. 23; Acts 24:16)? Can I do this in faith, or will I be doubting my action?

I encourage the reader to find other guidelines and principles for governing Christian conduct, which are found throughout the Word of God.

Sin is all around us. Our culture in the twenty-first century promotes sinful activities of all kinds. Television ads sell sensual immodesty, covetousness, gambling, drinking, and a host of other activities that counter a life of holiness. Websites make sins of every variety available with just a few keystrokes. If we are going to be holy as God is holy (1 Peter 1:16), we must learn to abstain (“refrain from, draw back from”) from sin. First Peter 2:11 and 12 repeat the command to abstain: *Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul; having your conversation honest among the Gentiles: that, whereas they speak against you as evildoers, they may by your good works, which they shall behold, glorify God in*

the day of visitation.

Overcoming temptation is possible when you...

Beware of the company you keep.

Be not thou envious against evil men, neither desire to be with them. Proverbs 24:1

Iron sharpeneth iron; so a man sharpeneth the countenance of his friend (Proverbs 27:17). A good friend will sharpen you, but an evil friend can dull you and drag you into sin with him. "Misery loves company." How true that saying is in light of the warning given to us by Solomon in Proverbs 4:14-16: Enter not into the path of the wicked, and go not in the way of evil men. Avoid it, pass not by it, turn from it, and pass away. For they sleep not, except they have done mischief; and their sleep is taken away, unless they cause some to fall.

This is not to say that you should totally isolate yourself from those who do not know Christ as their Savior, but you should not make unsaved people your closest friends. I would also avoid backslidden, carnal believers who can drag you down. Our Lord was the friend of publicans and sinners (Luke 7:34), but His close associates were His disciples. The believer should also have a friendly spirit (Proverbs 18:24) and a compassionate heart (Jude 1:22). We will never win the lost by snubbing them or coming across as being superior. However, since our character is partially molded by our friends, we need to make sure our close friends have the right kind of character.

Choose godly and wise friends:

I am a companion of all them that fear thee, and of them that keep thy precepts (Psalms 119:63). He that walketh with wise men shall be wise: but a companion of fools shall be destroyed (Proverbs 13:20). Whoso keepeth the law is a wise son: but he that is a companion of riotous men shameth his father (Proverbs 28:7).

Overcoming temptation is possible when you...

Burn your source(s) of sin.

Many of them also which used curious arts brought their books together, and burned them before all men: and they counted the price of them, and found it fifty thousand pieces of silver. Acts 19:19

These books of curious arts had to do with witchcraft and the occult. The Apostle Paul had been in Ephesus for two years and three months (Acts 19:8-10) preaching and teaching the gospel of Christ. God was greatly blessing and using the efforts of Paul.

Seven sons of Sceva (false exorcists) try to mimic the miracles God was performing through Paul (Acts 19:11, 12). Their attempt to cast out an evil spirit backfired. They ran from the house naked and wounded, because they used the name of Jesus on the demon without knowing Jesus as their Savior. This dramatic event showed Christ's power and resulted in many of these Jews and Greeks in Ephesus turning

from their occult practices to Christ. They had been set free from the power of Satan, but when they went to their homes they saw their libraries lined with books of instruction in all kinds of demonic activity. Like a chain reaction, all these new converts simultaneously loaded up all these books in their arms and brought them to the public square. They had been truly converted! They wanted all of their friends to know that they had changed, and that they were going to get rid of sin in their lives. The most exciting part of this story is that they did not care what these books had cost them.

Things need to go from our lives that would keep us involved in worldly habits and in outright sin. Maybe it is a stack of occult books or pornographic magazines that needs to be burned. Perhaps it is a stack of hard rock CDs (burning the messages of illicit sex and rebellion into the heart) that needs to be thrown into the fire. Perhaps it is getting a good filter installed so that you can more safely log on to the internet. Whatever it is that would hinder you and tempt you to go back into your old life, get rid of it. You will not have complete joy and victory until you do. By the way, do not sell these items at a garage sale. Count your loss as a gain in godliness (Philippians 3:8).

Notice what happened in Ephesus when these new Christians publicly followed Christ: *So mightily grew the word of God and prevailed* (Acts 19:20). This account in Acts 19 reminds me of another city where the gospel dramatically impacted the lives of new believers—Thessalonica: *For they themselves shew of us what manner of entering in we had unto you, and how ye **turned to God***

from idols to serve the living and true God; And to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, even Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath to come (1 Thessalonians 1:9, 10, emphasis mine). Often a believer focuses on what he or she is giving up rather on what is being gained. The Thessalonians gave up their lifeless idols, which cannot see, hear or speak, for the living and true God. They made a smart choice!

Summary

As we conclude this fourth and final chapter of Christian Growth from A to Z, may we all heed the words of God to Moses and the people of Israel stranded by the Red Sea – *Go forward*. There is not a Christian alive who has reached total Christ-likeness. We all have a long way to go in our total conformity to the Son of God. Whether you have been saved five days or fifty years, I challenge all readers of this book to grow, change, mature, conform to Christ and go forward.

You have been given thirty-two “ways of escape.” Now it is up to you to use them. You have heard the Word. Now it is your responsibility to do what it says (James 1:22-25)! Take God’s exits!

Overcoming temptation is possible when you...

Abstain from every appearance of evil
(1 Thessalonians 5:22).

Overcoming temptation is possible when you...

Beware of the company you keep (Proverbs 24:1).

Burn your source(s) of sin (Acts 19:19).

Consent not when sinners entice you (Proverbs 1:10).

Control your body and keep it in subjection
(1 Corinthians 9:27).

Dedicate your body as a living sacrifice (Romans 12:1).

Depend upon God (2 Corinthians 3:5).

Despise sin (Romans 12:9).

Esteem the reproach of Christ greater than the
pleasures and treasures of this world (Hebrews
11:26).

Flee youthful lusts (2 Timothy 2:22).

Grow daily in grace (2 Peter 3:18).

Hide God's Word in your heart (Psalm 119:11).

Imitate Jesus Christ, not the world (Romans 12:2).

Join a good Bible-preaching, Christ-honoring church
and attend it faithfully (Hebrews 10:25).

Know the Devil's devices, and are constantly on the
alert for his snares (2 Corinthians 2:11).

Look not on any evil thing (Psalm 101:3).

Love not the world (1 John 2:15-17).

Mourn over your sin and forsake it (Proverbs 28:13).

Nourish your weakness, building it into a strength
(Jude 1:20, 21).

Overcome the world by seeking more faith (1 John 5:4).

Pray for God to keep you from temptation
(Matthew 26:41).

Overcoming temptation is possible when you...

Put on the whole armor of God (Ephesians 6:10).

Quit placing yourself in the path of strong temptation
(Romans 13:14).

Remember that God sees everything you do
(Proverbs 15:3).

Submit yourself to God and resist the Devil
(James 4:7).

Think on things that will keep you from evil
(Philippians 4:8).

Uphold another brother in prayer as he prays for you
(James 5: 16a).

Visualize the Lord's imminent appearing to gather His
church; this will keep you pure (1 John 2:28).

Walk in the Spirit (Galatians 5:16).

eXercise your spiritual muscles with godly,
constructive activities (John 4:34).

Yield your members to God (Romans 6:13).

Zoom ahead, looking forward to what God has for
you – while forgetting your past (Philippians 3:13).