

The Internal Systems, Part 4

Scripture: Selected Scriptures

Code: 2028

INTRODUCTION

A. The Vision Described

In Revelation 1 is a powerful, wonderful presentation of the Worthy Lamb, the Son of God: "I, John, who also am your brother, and companion in tribulation, and in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ, was in the isle that is called Patmos, for the word of God, and for the testimony of Jesus Christ. I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and heard behind me a great voice, as of a trumpet, Saying, I am Alpha and Omega, the first and the last; and, What thou seest, write in a book, and send it unto the seven churches which are in Asia: unto Ephesus, and unto Smyrna, and unto Pergamum, and unto Thyatira, and unto Sardis, and unto Philadelphia, and unto Laodicea. And I turned to see the voice that spoke with me. And being turned, I saw seven golden lampstands, and in the midst of the seven lampstands one like the Son of man, clothed with a garment down to the foot, and girded about the breasts with a golden girdle. His head and His hair were white like wool, as white as snow; and His eyes were like a flame of fire; and His feet like fine bronze, as if they burned in a furnace; and His voice like the sound of many waters. And He had in His right hand seven stars; and out of His mouth went a sharp two-edged sword; and His countenance was as the sun shineth in its strength" (vv. 9-16).

B. The Vision Discussed

John had an incredible vision, and in it he saw the Lord Jesus Christ, the Alpha and the Omega. In that vision, Christ was moving among seven golden lampstands. They represent the seven churches mentioned in verse 11. The seven stars in Christ's hand represent the seven ministers of those churches, according to verse 20. The seven churches of Asia Minor that are mentioned in verse 11 and described by the letters in Revelation chapters 2 and 3 are representative of the different kinds of churches that have existed throughout church history. In the vision John described, we see the Lord moving among His churches, caring for the church that He purchased with His precious blood. Christ is still actively caring for His church today. The vision that John had was not just a vision for that place and time, but a vision for churches everywhere throughout history.

Verse 13 describes Christ as being "clothed with a garment down to the foot," and arrayed with a golden girdle. The prophets, priests, and kings of Israel dressed like that. Isn't it fitting that Christ is indeed King, Prophet, and Priest? He is sovereign. He moves in His church as One who speaks from God and takes His people to Him. In verse 14, we read that "His head and His hair were white like wool, as white as snow. . . ." That indicates His absolute, pure holiness. Verse 14 also says that "His eyes were like a flame of fire. " As Christ moves in His church, He looks at it with a penetrating gaze. His eyes are searching out strengths and weaknesses, and looking beyond the surface of things to ascertain what is really going on in His church.

How marvelous it is to know that Christ is alive in His church! It's wonderful to know that the church is not built and maintained by men. Christ is working in the church, and He knows what needs to be done. He searches His church with a penetrating gaze. Verse 15 says that His feet are like fine bronze, as if they blazed in a furnace, and that His voice is like the sound of many waters. Those represent His feet and voice of judgment. When He sees something in the church that displeases Him, He comes and speaks in judgment.

You say, "Why are you reading that?" Because I think it's good to remember that we are a part of the church that Christ is building. We are the lampstand that Christ is caring for. We are the light that Christ is trimming. He is looking at us with a penetrating gaze. He seeks things in us that are not right and brings against them the thunder of His voice in chastening judgment. He seeks to refine us, and if we resist, He will remove His blessing. In the letters to the churches of Asia Minor in Revelation chapters 2 and 3, He commended a few churches, but condemned most of them. The Lord did not see in them the purity He sought to find.

Just as Christ moved through the seven churches in Revelation 1:11, He moves through Grace Church. I believe He commends certain things and condemns others; He blesses things that are according to His will and chastens things that are not. It is my prayer that as I share with you from my heart, I will be able to stand in behalf of Christ and tell you what His searching eyes want to see in the church. I'm not saying that I'm an anointed prophet of God; I just believe that the Spirit of God has prompted us to study the things that a church should have.

Review

We've already talked about. . .

I. THE SKELETON

A. A High View of God

B. The Absolute Authority of Scripture

C. Sound Doctrine

D. Personal Holiness

E. Spiritual Authority

II. THE INTERNAL SYSTEMS

Just as a body is dependent on vital organs to keep it alive, a church is dependent upon certain spiritual attitudes to give it life:

A. Obedience

B. Humility

C. Love

D. Unity

E. Willingness to Serve

F. Joy

G. Peace

H. Thankfulness

I. Self-discipline

J. Accountability

K. Forgiveness

All of those attitudes must be cultivated in God's people. I believe the Lord moves through His church, searching people's hearts to see if they have those attitudes.

Another attitude that should be present in a church is. . .

L. Dependence

Put in negative terms, dependence is the attitude of insufficiency. It is sensing that you are not sufficient. That kind of attitude is hard to develop in capable people. It's hard to develop in churches like Grace Church, because there are so many competent people getting things done. Our past accomplishments show that we can get things done, and that's what makes us lose our sense of dependence on God. If a church isn't careful, then it can come to the point of eliminating God in its ministries because it's depending on the strength of its people and programs. That wouldn't happen so easily if we had the same problem as believers behind the Iron Curtain. They live daily in fear of death and have few resources. Those of us who have been abundantly blessed by God can easily forget Him. Remember when the Lord gave Israel the Promised Land? He gave them "great and goodly cities, which [they] builded not, and houses full of all good things, which [they] filledst not, and wells digged, which [they] diggedst not" (Deut. 6:10b-11a). Yet they still forgot about God.

It's easy to get absorbed with activities, great ideas, and bright hopes. But we have to make sure that we don't get so involved in them that we do things that aren't in God's will. We must maintain an attitude of dependence on God.

1. RUNNING AHEAD OF GOD

a. The Danger of Being Presumptuous

In Psalm 19, David said, "Keep back Thy servant also from presumptuous sins. . . ." (v. 13a). It's so easy to do things without being dependent on God--without searching for the heart and mind of God. It is important that when you make decisions, you pray to God with patience and commune with Him until you know that whatever you do will be the work of God. I've always had a fear of doing something in my ministry that God wasn't a part of. I've always wanted to walk at the same pace that Christ does. I want to have the same goals that He has, because He is building the church, not me. I don't want to compete with Him. But it's so easy to be presumptuous and do things without God's help.

An Unforgettable Lesson on Being Presumptuous

When I went to Talbot Seminary, all the students had to preach at least twice in the chapel they have there. As we preached, members of the faculty sat behind us on a platform with critique sheets that they would fill out during the sermons. If a student was only ten minutes into his sermon and he could hear the critique sheets being turned over to fill out the back, then he knew he was in trouble! Nevertheless, everyone tried their best.

I was assigned to preach on 2 Samuel 7. I wanted to make sure that I did a good job on it, so I literally memorized my sermon. I even memorized where my pauses were! I started my sermon by talking about David's desire to build a house for the ark of God. David felt bad because he lived in a beautiful palace while the ark of God was still in a tent. He told Nathan the prophet, "See, now, I dwell in an house of cedar, but the ark of God dwelleth within curtains" (v. 2). Nathan commended David and told him to go ahead and do what was on his heart (v. 3). But God said, "David will not build a house for Me, for he is a man of war and has shed blood" (1 Chr. 28:3). Solomon was the one that would build the house of God (2 Sam. 7:12-13). Although God did not allow David to build His house, He did give him a wonderful promise (vv. 8-16).

Using those verses, I preached on the sin of presuming on God. It was a life-changing experience for me because that message has stuck in my mind through the years. When I finished preaching, one of the professors handed me his critique sheet. I opened it up, and he hadn't even used it. Instead, he wrote on it, "You missed the entire point of the passage. " That ruined my day, but it was a very good lesson. The professor thought that I should have preached on the Kingdom promise that God gave to David. I knew the passage talked about the Kingdom promise, but I felt my own heart needed to hear about presumption, because I tend to move ahead too fast on things sometimes. Frequently I need to remind myself to be dependent on God--to seek His heart and mind. It just takes a few instances of going out on a limb without God and getting sawed off to help cure the problem of being presumptuous.

b. The Demand for Being Prayerful

Prayer is a key element in preventing presumptuousness. A church must have a spirit of dependence. When a church has many wonderful programs and ministries, it is easy to stop depending on God. There must be a sustained dependence, because God can easily chose to stop blessing us.

2. RUNNING WITH GOD

a. An Example of Dependency

1) The Panic

In John 14, we see a different aspect of dependence on God. Jesus was in the upper room, having His last discourse with His disciples before He left them. In that discourse, He made many wonderful promises for them because they were afraid of what would happen after He left. They had depended on Him for everything for three years. He made the food that fed them; He helped them pay their taxes, and He had told them everything they needed to know about the Kingdom, God, man, sin, and righteousness. The disciples were troubled now about Jesus' departure because they knew how dependent they were on Him.

2) The Promise

a) Expressed

While the disciples were becoming panicky, Jesus made them a wonderful promise: "... whatever ye shall ask in My name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If ye shall ask anything in My name, I will do it" (vv. 13-14). You say, "Does that mean that Jesus will give us anything we ask for?" No; He only gives what is asked for in His name. Some people think that if you say, "In Jesus' name" at the end of a prayer, then you will get your request. But that's not what Jesus was talking about.

b) Explained

In the Old Testament, God said that His name was "I AM THAT I AM" (Ex. 3:14). In other words, "My name is everything that I am." Christ's name is all that He is. So when you ask for something in His name, what you ask for should be consistent with His plan, will, and desire. If it is, then He will do what you ask. We need to learn to live in constant dependency on God and pray, "Lord, whatever You want, do it." If we do that, then we won't be bitter if something doesn't happen the way we want it to. That's how the Father is glorified, because then He is doing what He wants to do for His own glory. When we let God energize our ministry, then we know it's His ministry that is being carried on in the name of His Son.

b. An Encouragement for Dependency

1) Praying for God's Desire

I want the ministry at Grace Church to be God's ministry, not the ministry of clever, creative men. We should want the ministry of the Spirit of God in the name of the Son of God to be for the glory of God Himself. We need in our hearts a sense of insufficiency so that we are forced to depend on God and pray for whatever Jesus wants done. When the disciples asked Jesus to teach them how to pray, He said, "When ye pray, say, Our Father, who art in heaven, Hallowed be Thy name...." (Lk. 11:2a). When you say, "Hallowed be Thy name," then you are saying, "Lord, let your name be glorified and exalted." The prayer continues, "... Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, as in heaven, so in earth" (Lk. 11:2b). We should pray that God will do on earth what He is doing in His heavenly Kingdom. The Disciples' Prayer doesn't begin by saying, "Give us this and that." It starts out, "Hallowed be Thy name. Thy Kingdom come. Thy will be done." We should have that perspective; we have no right to ask for anything. That prayer teaches us to pray in a dependent way--to pray for God to do His work His way.

2) Praying for God's Direction

It has always been the goal of Grace Church to let Christ build the church and we just be a part of it. But sometimes I'm afraid we will become so program oriented that we will forget to pray for God's will to be done until a disaster hits. As long as we ask God to guide us, then we won't have any problems. We don't want to do anything that God doesn't want us to do. That's why there needs to be an attitude of dependence. I am grateful that the people of Grace Church have had that attitude; yet I encourage them to keep growing in it. We have depended on God and His Word and we have sought Him in prayer, but we can still improve our attitude of dependence. I think sometimes we get caught up in the milieu of contemporary Christianity and work more than we should and pray less

than we should.

There's nothing more wonderful than spending time in prayer before doing something, and then doing it with a sense of freedom in your heart that lets you know you are walking side by side with the Savior as His will is being done. When I started teaching this series on the anatomy of a church, that's the feeling I got. I didn't know where the Lord was going to lead us as we studied together, but I have sensed the companionship of Christ because I prayed to Him regarding what needed to be taught at this time about His church.

The next attitude I'd like to study is the attitude of. . .

M. Flexibility

1. THE HINDRANCE CAUSED BY ROUTINE

We need to have the ability to change. Somebody once said that the seven last words of the church are, "We've never done it that way before!" That's really true.

a. The Observance of Tradition

In Matthew 15, some Pharisees and scribes came up to Jesus and confronted Him, saying, "Why do Thy disciples transgress the tradition of the elders? For they wash not their hands when they eat bread" (v. 2). By that they meant that the disciples were not doing the required ceremonial rituals before they ate, not that the disciples weren't washing their hands. Jesus responded, ". . . Why do ye also transgress the commandment of God by your tradition?" (v. 3). We've all been obsessed with tradition before. Some churches have so many traditions that they end up not being able to do what the Word of God commands. Sometimes a church will see a command in the Bible and say, "We can't do that; we must maintain the tradition we've had." Some churches have a style of ministry that is so unbiblical that when they are introduced to a command from God that goes against their traditions, they ignore it. There must be an attitude of flexibility in a church.

b. The Objection to Tradition

People often ask me to send them an organizational chart of Grace Church so that they can learn how we are set up. That would be impossible, because things are always changing. God is always working through different people that at different times are strong, weak, very committed, or less committed. There are always new people joining the church, and God works through them. I think that the constant change is wonderful because then we aren't allowed to try to administrate things on our own power. People are always learning new things and becoming stronger in their Christian walk. That helps us avoid falling into routines that keep us from the reality of God's Word. We don't want tradition to get in the way if we learn something new about what God wants us to do.

c. The Obsession with Tradition

My wife had a distant relative that we used to visit during the holiday season. The last time we visited her was during Christmastime. While we were visiting, she said, "John, do you have a Christmas Eve service at your church?" I said, "No; we don't. We just encourage everybody to be at home with their families and talk about the meaning of Christmas and the birth of the Lord." She said, "That's too bad. At our church, we've always had a Christmas Eve service." I said, "Do you go to them?" She said, "No one goes, but we've always had a Christmas Eve service."

We humans are creatures of habit. If we have good habits, then that's great, but if we have bad habits, then they are hard to break. When a group of people get used to a certain way of doing things, it is amazing how resistant they will be to change. But change is sometimes needed so people don't get confused between routine and reality. We need to be flexible because we depend upon God. Sometimes He will do one thing in different ways. It grieves my heart when I see a young pastor start teaching a church the Word of God and the people of the church not respond because they are set in their routines. Such people will say, "We can't apply the Word of God in that situation because we'll upset a few people if we don't keep our tradition." They let the traditions of

men stand in the way of the commandments of God.

2. THE HARMONY THAT COMES BY RESILIENCE

a. In a Church

I'm very grateful that at Grace Church we've been able to be flexible. When I first started pastoring and the congregation and I studied the Word of God together, we realized that certain things needed to be changed so that they would be in line with God's will. That attitude continues to prevail.

Sometimes we send out young pastors to other churches, and they come back saying, "I've tried to break down the wall of tradition at that church, but I don't know if the people there will ever change. " We have to be flexible.

b. In a Christian

We need to be flexible in our personal lives, too. When Paul had finished his ministry in Galatia and Phrygia (cities that were in the area now known as Turkey), he wanted to go south into Asia (the seven churches of Asia Minor were there). He started going in that direction, but the Holy Spirit stopped him (Ac. 16:6). Paul didn't let that keep him from ministering somewhere else. He said to his companions, "We've already been east, and we can't go south, so let's go north to Bithynia. " The Holy Spirit didn't allow that either (v. 7). The only direction they could go now was west, and the ocean was in that direction. Not knowing what to do, Paul probably prayed to God about where he should go. When he and his companions were asleep, Paul had a vision. In it was a man from Macedonia that said, " . . . Come over into Macedonia, and help us" (v. 9). So Paul went to Macedonia, and that began the gospel's spread beyond the Middle East to the rest of the world. Paul was flexible about where God took him.

Some time ago, one of our elders at Grace Church, a Jewish Christian, had a burden to reach Jewish people for Christ. His desire was to go to Paris and reach out to the Jewish people there. He got involved in the Bible Christian Union, a mission group that serves in France. They helped train and prepare him. A plaque was put up in my dad's church reminding everyone of his goal. But when he was ready to be used by God, the Lord placed him in Montreal, Canada. There are many French-speaking Jewish people there, just as there are in Paris. God had a different place in mind, and the missionary was flexible.

The church has to be flexible too. It has to be able to say, "God, we depend on You to lead us, and we're willing to move wherever you take us. " Flexibility is an important attitude.

The people of a church also need to have the attitude of. . .

N. Growth

1. THE PASSION FOR GROWTH

It is important for us to have within us the desire to grow. First Peter 2:2 says, "As newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that ye may grow by it. " That analogy isn't talking about the milk of the Word as opposed to the meat (1 Cor. 3:2). Peter is simply saying, "In the same way babies desire milk, you must desire the Word so that you can grow. " How much does a baby desire milk? If you've had a baby before, you know that they will kick and scream when they want milk. They have a single-minded devotion to milk. Peter says we're to have that same consuming desire for the Word.

How strong is your desire for the Word? Do you ever have a real hunger for the Word? Do you have to exert effort to open the Bible and read it, or is your heart magnetically drawn to it? Are you growing? We grow by feeding on the Word of God. We don't all have the same capacities to grow, but whatever capacity we do have, we should use to the fullest. Even though we all have different abilities, the Spirit of God works in all of our hearts to help us love His Word and grow at the pace that we can grow. The thing that would give me the greatest fear in my heart would be if Grace

Church stopped growing. It would be terrible to hear people say, "I've had enough theology; I've heard so much exposition of the Scripture that I know more than I want to. I think I'll just leave." I just pray that the people of Grace Church will never lose their desire to grow.

2. THE PROCESS OF GROWTH

In 2 Peter 3:18, Peter said, ". . . grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. . . ." When we grow, we're not just learning facts in a book; we're growing in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ! We're getting to know Him! When you become born into the family of God, 1 John 2:13-14 says that you are a child and you know the Father (v. 13c). As you grow and become a spiritual young man, the Word of God dwells in you and you "overcome the wicked one" (vv. 13b, 14b). First you know God in a simple way, then you become familiar with doctrine. When you are a spiritual father, then "ye have known Him that is from the beginning" (vv. 13a, 14a). In other words, you're not just learning doctrine, you're learning to know God. The more you know God, the more enriching your fellowship with Him will be. Think of the most wonderful person you've ever met, and how great it would be to have a friendship with him that continually grew. You should desire to have that kind of growing relationship with the infinite, holy God of the universe. Do you have a hunger for the Word? Do you meditate on it? Do you feed on it daily? Can you say with Job that you love the Word of God more than your necessary food (Job 23:12b)? You should be growing. If you think you know a lot, you still don't know enough. You may know many facts from the Word of God, but do you know God as well as you should know Him? When I study a passage in the Bible, I always try to learn more about God's character so that I can get to know Him better. The next attitude the people of a church should have is. . .

O. Faithfulness

1. AN ENDURING QUALITY

Many Christians are spiritual sprinters--they get involved, serve for a while with all their energy, but then go into spiritual retirement. God is looking for marathon runners--people who will run a long distance. First Corinthians 4:2 says, "Moreover, it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful." Long-term spiritual commitment is wonderful. A person in his eighties in our fellowship recently said to me, "Could you slow down when you preach? I'm having trouble keeping up taking notes." I love that! He's over eighty years old, and still taking sermon notes! He's still excited about the Word, the life of God, and the church. He's faithful to the ministry. He hasn't quit in his commitment to God. It's the people who teach, disciple, and serve others for years that are the stalwarts of the faith. Their ministry is not based on an emotional appeal or a temporary response to a need; it's based upon their character. They have an enduring quality. Many people come to Grace Church only when it's convenient. Some people even serve for a while when it's convenient. But to them, service is low on their list of priorities. But those who are committed remain steadfast. We need to have that spirit of faithfulness. We need to have enduring commitment.

In 2 Timothy 4:6-7, Paul said, "For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith." What a great statement! He was saying, "I can die now; I'm done. I've finished the task God gave me. I've fought the fight, and kept the faith." Those are wonderful words!

2. AN ELUSIVE QUALITY

It's sad when you see an older Christian become indifferent about their commitment to God. Sometimes you see that happen to preachers, teachers, or other Christian workers when they become older. They become bitter and self-centered. It's beautiful to see a person grow old and

continue in a life of faithful service. We all have the responsibility to have faithful spirits and meet with the Lord's people regularly.

Not everybody that comes to Grace Church comes faithfully. If they did, that would be amazing. Sometimes when my wife and I go to a store, someone will come up to me and say, "I know you. You're John MacArthur. I go to your church." I'll say, "How wonderful! I haven't seen you before. Were you there last Sunday?" The other person will say, "No, I wasn't there last Sunday. It's been a while since I've gone. But I love Grace Church." It makes me sad when people come to church only when it's convenient. A faithful Christian always makes a priority of worshiping, serving, and praying consistently. It's sad when people are distracted by other things and don't keep their priorities right. The last attitude I'd like to mention is the attitude of. . .

P. Hope

1. REJOICING WITH AN ETERNAL PERSPECTIVE

Hope is a great word. For a Christian, hope means `security for the future.' There is no fear of death. We can actually look forward to what's ahead of us in life and death.

I love Paul's expression in Romans 12:12, "Rejoicing in hope. . . ." Death holds no fear for us. A funeral service for a Christian should be a cause for rejoicing and praising God because that person has gone from this place of tears, disease, death, and limitations to a place that's free of those things. We are saved by hope (Rom. 8:24a), and look forward to eternity, when we'll be like Christ. We look forward to the fulfillment of Romans 8:23, which says that we'll have a redeemed body to go with our redeemed soul. We live in hope.

2. REFRAINING FROM AN EARTHLY PERSPECTIVE

It's important for us to have an attitude of hope. Practically speaking, that means we shouldn't become too obsessed with earthly things. Jesus said, "Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal; for where your treasure is, there will your heart be also" (Mt. 6:19). If our hearts are focusing on our hope in eternity, then our treasure is going to be in eternity, too. I hope you aren't living for the moment. Don't live for what is temporal. We should be living in hope, and that means we should be more committed to investing in eternity than investing in what is temporary. Our energy, thoughts, dreams, prayers, and money are only ours as a means to invest in an eternal reality. We live in hope; we live in the light of eternity. We have a wonderful future before us!

If all the attitudes that we've talked about are present in the church, then it will be all that Christ wants it to be!

Focusing on the Facts

1. What is Christ doing as He moves in His church? Why is it important to know that?
2. Put in negative terms, dependence is the attitude of _____.
3. Why is an attitude of dependence hard for competent people to develop?
4. What must you do before you make decisions so you will know that what you are doing is the work of God?

5. Why were Jesus' disciples afraid when He said He would leave them? What did He do to reassure them that everything would be okay?
6. Explain what Jesus meant when He said, "If ye shall ask anything in My name, I will do it." (Jn. 14:14)
7. What perspective does the Disciples' Prayer teach us to have? How does it do that? (Lk. 11:2)
8. What can happen to a church that places great emphasis on traditions?
9. Why would it be bad to try to keep the organizational structure of a church the same over an extended period of time?
10. Why is change sometimes needed in a church?
11. Explain how Paul showed flexibility in his circumstances. (Ac. 16:6- 10)
12. According to 1 Peter 2:2, what are we to desire? Why?
13. What should we do with the capacity we have to grow? What does the Spirit of God do in all of our hearts?
14. What is the nature of our growth, according to 2 Peter 3:18? Describe the steps of growth mentioned in 1 John 2:13-14.
15. Describe spiritual sprinters. What kind of runner is God looking for? What is required of a steward, according to 1 Corinthians 4:2?
16. What things are the ministry of a committed person not based upon? What is it based upon?
17. What does the word hope mean to a Christian? What does a Christian have to look forward to?
18. To keep our perspective of hope, what should we refrain from doing? (Mt. 6:19)
19. As Christians, we should be living in hope. Consequently, what should we be committed to?

Pondering the Principles

1. It is important for you to be dependent on God in all that you do. Write a list of the things you are currently doing in your church. Look at your list, and ask yourself these questions: How much do I pray about each of the things I am doing? Have I sought God's divine guidance whenever I needed to make a decision? How much do I depend on God in each of the things I am doing? Examine your

life and make sure that you are depending on God in every aspect of your church life. If you are not dependent on God, then it is very easy to do things that are not a part of His will.

2. Describe how the people in the following passages were flexible to change: Genesis 12:1-5; Exodus 12:31-35; Judges 7:1-8; Ezra 10:2-3, 9-12; Psalm 139:23-24; Matthew 4:18-22; and Acts 9:1-22. Notice that in each of those examples, the willingness to be flexible was a response of obedience to God. Do you have any traditions or sins in your life that you have not been flexible to remove so that you are following God's commands? Why? Make sure that your life is characterized by a willingness to do whatever the Lord wants you to do.

3. If you were to draw a chart of your growth pattern as a Christian, what would it look like? Has your rate of growth continued to accelerate as you mature in Christ? What specific steps are you taking now to maintain your growth as a Christian? To make sure that you are continually growing in Christ, specify the ways you plan to maintain your growth, and keep track of your progress at regular intervals.

4. Write a list of the different ways you have served in your church on a regular basis. How many of those things are you still doing? Next to the things that you aren't doing any more, write how long you served in that capacity. Do you have a pattern of being involved in things for only a short period of time? For each of the things you aren't doing any more, ask yourself why you stopped doing it. Do you find that your involvement may be based on superficial things such as an emotional appeal or a temporary interest in something? Ask God for His guidance in your current areas of service, and make sure that you have a true, enduring commitment to what you are doing for His church.

5. How often do you think about your future life in eternity? What things are you doing now that show you are investing in eternity?

Does the way you spend your time, money, and energy show that you are laying up for yourself treasures on earth? As a Christian, you have the privilege of rejoicing in the hope that you have before you. Don't allow earthly things to distract you!

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