

March/April 2026

# DISCERN

*Bonus Issue*

A Magazine of *Life Hope & Truth*

**Don't Be  
Overly Righteous**

**or Overly Wicked?**



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**Bonus Issue** A Magazine of [LifeHopeandTruth.com](http://LifeHopeandTruth.com)

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# Don't Be Overly Righteous or Overly Wicked?

Does God want us to avoid being too good or too bad? Is that what Solomon meant? What should we learn from this seeming contradiction in Ecclesiastes?

*By Bruce Gore*



**M**any have wondered about the exhortations found in Ecclesiastes 7:16-17: “Do not be overly righteous, nor be overly wise: Why should you destroy yourself? Do not be overly wicked, nor be foolish: Why should you die before your time?”

Is Solomon saying that if one’s conduct doesn’t fall within some medium standard between righteousness and wickedness, that the result could be destruction or a premature death?

*The Keil-Delitzsch Commentary* says that these counsels warn “against extremes, on the side of good as well as on that of evil” (note on Ecclesiastes 7:15-16). And later, “But it is strange that the author now warns against an excess in wickedness, so that he seems to find wickedness, up to certain degree, praiseworthy and advisable” (note on Ecclesiastes 7:17).

## Contradictions?

But aren’t we supposed to strive for righteousness and to put away all evil? Didn’t Christ say, “Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect” (Matthew 5:48)? Aren’t we to seek to be holy as He is holy (1 Peter 1:15-16)?

Only the righteous will receive eternal life (Matthew 25:46). The apostle Paul says that the unrighteous man will not inherit the Kingdom (1 Corinthians 6:9).

“For the eyes of the LORD are on the righteous, and His ears are open to their prayers; but the face of the LORD is against those who do evil” (1 Peter 3:12).

And doesn’t the prophet Amos say we are to hate evil and love good (Amos 5:15)?

On the surface, those verses in Ecclesiastes seem to contradict everything else we find in God’s Word. Yet Paul wrote, “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness” (2 Timothy 3:16).

And Jesus said, “The Scripture cannot be broken” (John 10:35). The Bible does not contradict itself.

So, what does God want us to learn from those verses? If they aren’t contradictory to other scriptures, how should they be understood? In what way are they profitable to those of us who are seeking to live by the Word of God? Let’s look into what Solomon meant by overly righteous or overly wicked.

## Overly righteous

“Do not be overly righteous, nor be overly wise: Why should you destroy yourself?” (Ecclesiastes 7:16).

Reading the rest of the Bible, it would seem that the more righteous we are, the more pleasing to God we would be. And of course, that is true.

Is it possible to be *too* righteous? Or does the Bible speak of a “righteousness” that might not, in fact, be pleasing to God? Is this a way of saying we should avoid being self-righteous? The only true righteousness is that which comes from following guidelines revealed through the Holy Scriptures, not what we might choose to come up with on our own.

The Jews of Paul’s time had tried to establish their own righteousness.

“Brethren, my heart’s desire and prayer to God for Israel is that they may be saved. For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge. For they being ignorant of God’s righteousness, and seeking to *establish their own righteousness*, have not submitted to the righteousness of God” (Romans 10:1-3, emphasis added).

## The Pharisees’ wrong approach to righteousness

In His ministry, Christ was surrounded by religious leaders who considered themselves super righteous.

Like many religious people today, they had substituted religious traditions for God’s commandments. Jesus spoke to them about this wrong tendency, “Why do you also transgress the commandment of God because of your tradition? . . . Well did Isaiah prophesy about you, saying: ‘These people draw near to Me with their mouth, and honor Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me. And in vain they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men’” (Matthew 15:3, 7-9).

Jesus’ later correction of the scribes and Pharisees was even more direct and forceful:

“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you cleanse the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of extortion and self-indulgence. Blind Pharisee, first cleanse the inside of the cup and dish, that the outside of them may be clean also. Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs which indeed appear beautiful outwardly, but inside are full of dead men’s bones and all uncleanness. Even so you also outwardly appear righteous to men, but inside you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness” (Matthew 23:25-28).

Jesus had much to say about those “who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others” (Luke 18:9). Their criteria for righteousness came from their own ideas and traditions, rather than the Word of God.

Moses warned against adding to or taking away from the instruction we have in the Holy Scriptures. “Whatever I command you, be careful to observe it; you shall not add to it nor take away from it” (Deuteronomy 12:32).

The scribes and Pharisees failed to heed that admonition. Jesus observed, “For they bind heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on men’s shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers” (Matthew 23:4).

They thought they could make themselves and their followers more righteous by adding to God’s laws, requiring much more than what God had said! So, over the centuries they had added hundreds of additional rules and traditions, making it very difficult just to remember all of them, let alone live by them.

## Modern parallel

Sadly, many of the teachings and practices of churches today are similarly based on nonbiblical traditions handed down for generations. These include holidays with pagan roots like Christmas and Easter, which have been substituted for the clear biblical commands to observe [God’s festivals](#). These nonbiblical customs clearly add to and take away from the laws God plainly commanded for us.

Jeremiah prophesied that someday people would wake up to the lies they had inherited. “O LORD, my strength and my fortress, my refuge in the day of affliction, the Gentiles shall come to You from the ends of the earth and say, ‘Surely our fathers have inherited lies, worthlessness and unprofitable things’” (Jeremiah 16:19).

Nonbiblical practices are worthless in advancing our relationship with God. Even worse, such practices can

give a false sense of righteousness! “There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death” (Proverbs 14:12).

## **Do not be overly wicked**

Okay, so what about being “overly wicked”? “Do not be overly wicked, nor be foolish: Why should you die before your time?” (Ecclesiastes 7:17).

Is this saying that to be slightly wicked, evil or unrighteous is acceptable? How much wickedness can we allow into our lives before we cross the line of “overly” or too much?

To say that Solomon is advocating a middle ground between wickedness and righteousness is contradictory to a host of other statements, not only in Ecclesiastes, but also the rest of Scripture. One’s goal should be to not be wicked at all!

The Bible does not contradict itself. A few verses later, verse 20 helps us to understand his point: “For there is not a just man on earth who does good and does not sin.”

So it seems Solomon is saying, I know you are going to make mistakes, and you are going to sin. But do realize that there are some sins that are even more damaging, more permanent, and harder to get over than others. There are some that can cause you to die prematurely, just as there are some that can hurt other people and sometimes irrevocably destroy relationships—sins like murder and child abuse and adultery. Any sin can be forgiven, but some leave memories and scars that are even harder to get past.

Like the book of Proverbs, Ecclesiastes is primarily directed to young people. Without the wisdom and experience of an older person, they tend to make more mistakes in their youth and are more vulnerable to poor judgment and sins. David spoke of the “sins of my youth” (Psalm 25:7).

So in Ecclesiastes, Solomon especially has in mind the young man who lacks maturity and experience. A few chapters later, he wrote:

“Rejoice, O young man, in your youth, and let your heart cheer you in the days of your youth; walk in the ways of your heart, and in the sight of your eyes; but know that for all these God will bring you into judgment. Therefore remove sorrow from your heart, and put away evil from your flesh, for childhood and youth are vanity” (Ecclesiastes 11:9-10).

Solomon admonishes young people to enjoy those years of their youth; they’ll soon be gone. They are

going to make some mistakes—everyone does—but they should do their best to especially avoid the kind of mistakes that could do irreversible damage to themselves and others.

We should do our best to avoid all sins, but especially those that hurt and scar more. Some leave deep scars. Some can even sear the conscience, resulting in a person no longer being ashamed or bothered by the sins, and this is very dangerous.

If we will listen to these warnings, we can avoid a lot of pain and problems. “It is good that you grasp this, and also not remove your hand from the other; for he who fears God will escape them all” (Ecclesiastes 7:18).

## **We all sin even after repentance and baptism**

So we see that, rather than being contradictory, these verses actually support all that is taught throughout the rest of the Word of God.

In our journey to become truly righteous (not self-righteous) by developing the mind of Christ, we will slip up from time to time. We must not let that deter us or cause us to give up. This is part of learning and growing as a Christian.

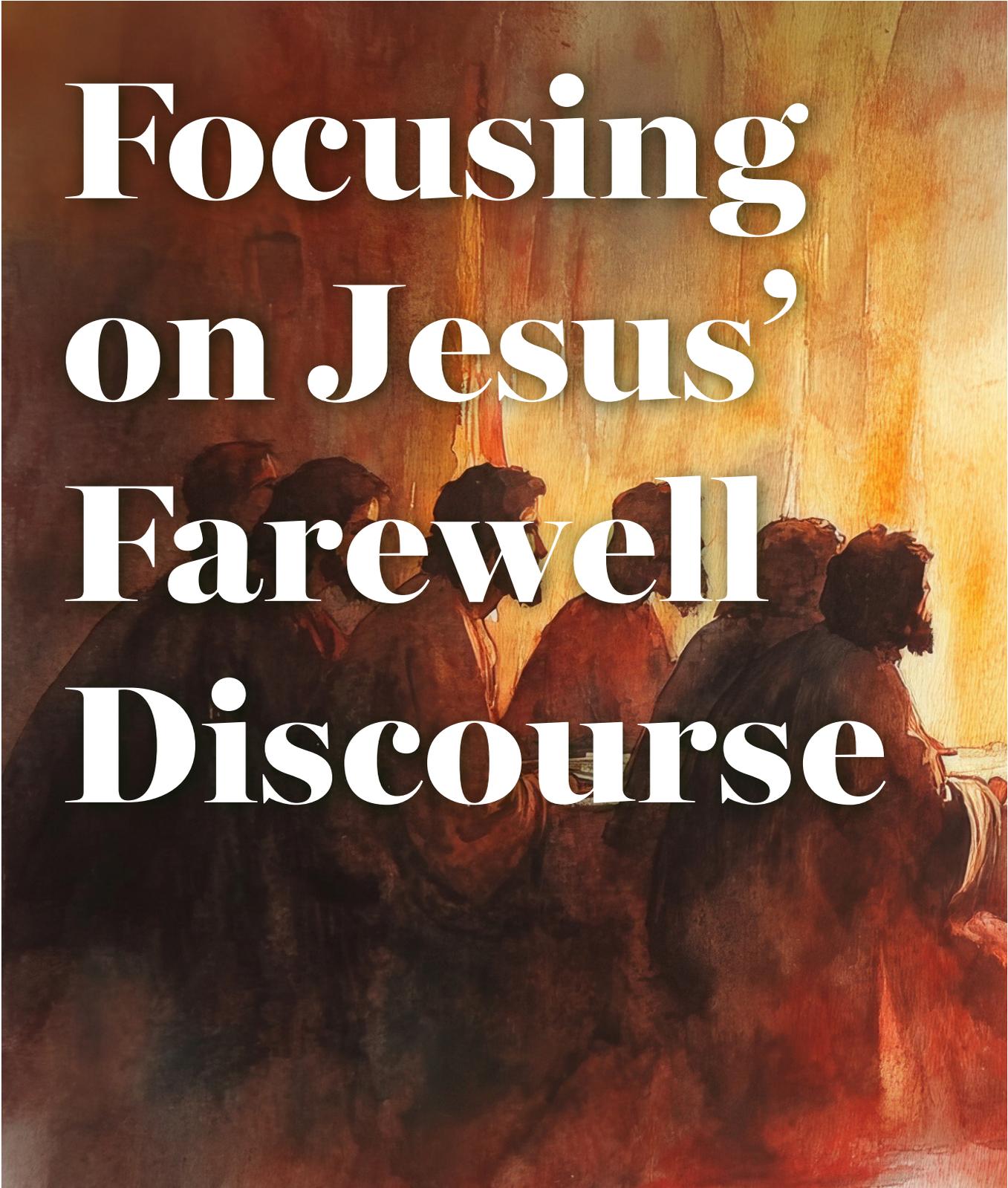
It is a battle to remove sin from our conduct. But it is a winnable one with God’s help. You will face many temptations and obstacles. All who are already on that straight and narrow path know—we’ve been there! But Christ assured us that “he who endures to the end will be saved” (Matthew 10:22).

We are called to be holy as He is holy and to strive to live a life free of sin. And what is sin? (See our article “[What Is Sin?](#)”) How would we even know what sin is but for the righteous law of God?

David, a man after God’s own heart, wrote, “The law of the LORD is perfect, converting the soul; the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple; the statutes of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes; the fear of the LORD is clean, enduring forever; the judgments of the LORD are true and righteous altogether. More to be desired are they than gold, yea, than much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb” (Psalm 19:7-10).

Obedience to that beautiful law of love is an essential step toward achieving righteousness.

If you want to look deeper into this journey toward true, godly righteousness, check out our article “[How to Be Righteous.](#)” 



# Focusing on Jesus' Farewell Discourse

The Gospel of John presents the most detailed look at Jesus' words on the night before His death. In His severest trial He gave us great encouragement.

*By Mike Bennett*



All four Gospels record memorable and meaningful sayings of our Savior. But only John records many specifics of Jesus' final message for His closest disciples—and for us.

His friends could sense His sorrow and apprehension about the suffering just ahead. But instead of focusing inward, Jesus turned His attention to comforting, encouraging and strengthening them.

They were about to experience their greatest test as well, and He was preparing them for it.

### **What John wants us to know**

John was not limited by the normal vagaries of memory or restricted by a need to give a full overview of Jesus' life and teachings. Three others had already done that, and God supplied John with the recall to be able to choose other episodes from the vast store of things Jesus did (John 14:26; 21:25).

So why did John choose to write what he did? He gives his purpose in John 20:30-31.

“And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of

God, and that believing you may have life in His name.”

He wrote these things for you and for me.

We also need to believe. Seeds of doubt, waves of sadness, attacks of discouragement besiege us as well. We need Christ's comfort and assurance. We need to see the fruit of God's Spirit conquer the works of flesh and darkness.

The details of Jesus' final discourse and prayer (John 13:31 through 17:26) are unique to the book of John.

John's Gospel is different. He compels us to look harder, dig deeper, think more intensely, feel more fully.

Jesus' words in this passage confront us with a deeper symbolism that provoked misunderstandings even among His disciples.

But in the end, His message strengthened His disciples for the devastating trial they were about to face.

And John's record of it has empowered Christ's followers from the first century to today.

### **Jesus comforts His disciples**

Jesus told His closest friends that one of them would betray Him (John 13:21). He and His disciples were understandably troubled.

Jesus didn't sugarcoat the upheaval to come. But He did pivot to a message full of comfort.

He displayed and offered them love, peace and joy. He demonstrated calm confidence in the face of impending crisis.

Twice in John 14 Jesus said, “Let not your heart be troubled” (verses 1, 27).

That’s easier said than done, of course. But God offers faith and peace as antidotes to fear.

Christ promised to prepare a place for His followers and to return (John 14:2-3; to explore this passage more deeply, see “[Many Mansions \(in Heaven?\)](#)”). Christ the King will abundantly welcome and meaningfully employ His followers when He comes. This good news of the Kingdom of God provides an anchor of hope. It illuminates a vision that can inspire and motivate us.

But John reminds us that understanding Jesus’ message does not come easily. First Peter, then Thomas, then Philip, then Judas (not Iscariot) sought clarification.

Ultimately, understanding Jesus’ answers requires spiritual help through “the Helper, the Holy Spirit” (John 14:26).

## Jesus teaches about relationships

Christ calls Christians to abide in Him—to connect to Him. We must remain attached even when enduring the pain of pruning—the removal of aspects of our lives that don’t reflect Him, [the true vine](#) (John 15:1-8). Our relationship to Christ allows us to bear the spiritual fruit He desires.

Christ also instructs His followers to “love one another as I have loved you” (verse 12).

Though Christians are to treat all with love, Jesus warned that in this world, they won’t always receive love in return. In fact, as the world hated Christ, those in the world will hate us (verse 18). Jesus gave this warning so we

wouldn’t be surprised and stumble (John 16:1).  
But He will send the help we need.

## The Holy Spirit and the fruit of the Spirit

Jesus promised not to leave His disciples as orphans, alone and in need. He had been their Helper and Comforter, and now in His absence He would send another Helper, the Holy Spirit (John 14:16-18).

The word translated “Helper” in the New King James Version also has other translations, such as Comforter in the King James Version. “The word *paracletos* signifies not only a comforter, but also an ‘advocate,’ a ‘defender’ of a cause, a ‘counsellor, patron, mediator” (*Adam Clarke’s Commentary*, comment on John 14:16).

At that point the disciples had the Holy Spirit with them, but soon, Jesus told them, the Spirit “will be in you” (verse 17). This “Promise of the Father” would come to them on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 1:4; 2:4).

Through the Holy Spirit, Jesus and the Father dwell with us, enabling us to produce fruit in our lives—spiritual fruit such as love, joy and peace:

- “If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love, just as I have kept My Father’s commandments and abide in His love” (John 15:10).
- “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another” (John 13:34-35).
- “Most assuredly, I say to you that you will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice; and you will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will be turned into joy. A woman, when she

is in labor, has sorrow because her hour has come; but as soon as she has given birth to the child, she no longer remembers the anguish, for joy that a human being has been born into the world. Therefore you now have sorrow; but I will see you again and your heart will rejoice, and your joy no one will take from you” (John 16:20-22).

- “Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid” (John 14:27).
- “These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world” (John 16:33).

Study more about spiritual fruit in the Bible Journey “[The Fruit of the Spirit](#).”

## **The High Priestly prayer (John 17)**

After these three chapters of instruction to the disciples, John gives us a glimpse of Jesus’ heartfelt prayer for His disciples—and for us. None of His other prayers are recorded as fully as this one.

It is often called the High Priestly prayer, since in it Jesus Christ interceded for us (Hebrews 7:25).

First Jesus talked to the Father about the work He had accomplished and His longing to return to the glorious state He had had with the Father “before the world was” (John 17:1-5).

Then He prayed specifically for His disciples. “Holy Father, keep through Your name those whom You have given Me, that they may be one as We are” (verse 11).

Jesus considered His followers a precious gift from the Father, a fact He mentioned seven times (verses 2, 6 [twice], 9, 11, 12, 24).

They were *in* the world, but not *of* this evil world—this society influenced by Satan. Jesus asked the Father to protect them from the evil one (verse 15). They were to be [sanctified—set apart—by God’s truth](#) (verse 17).

And He prayed for us!

“I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me” (verses 20-21).

Jesus desired that His Church would experience the unity He and the Father enjoyed. Love and unity were to be hallmarks of His followers.

## **Comfort and inspiration for today**

Christ’s final discourse and prayer continue to encourage, strengthen and motivate God’s people today. Many study them in preparation for the New Testament Passover each year, and ministers of the Church of God read through these profound words at the Passover service.

And whenever a Christian is facing turmoil, trials or even the tediousness of life, Christ’s farewell message can give comfort and rejuvenation.

“It is often in the words of a dying person that one learns what is dearest and most crucial to him” (*A Complete Literary Guide to the Bible*, 1993, pp. 414-415).

Knowing what was important to our Redeemer can help reorient us to what is truly important.

Study further in our articles “[The Gospel of John](#)” and “[I Am the Way, the Truth, and the Life](#).” 

# This Is My Body **Given** for You



At the Passover meal the night before His crucifixion, Jesus broke bread, saying, “This is My body which is given for you.” Can we grasp what this means for us?

*By Bill Palmer*

**G**athered around their Master during the Passover, the disciples must have been stunned by what Jesus said. Breaking some unleavened bread, He told them, “This is My body which is given for you” (Luke 22:19).

Jesus uttered these words the night before His death. What did He mean?

Jesus was showing His disciples that the bread He broke symbolized His body and that He would suffer and die the following day.

## **Beaten, scourged and crucified**

In the modern world, many of us have difficulty comprehending the brutality Jesus endured. That suffering began shortly after His arrest in the Garden of Gethsemane.

Between His arrest and death, Jesus was beaten by His captors, bruised and beaten during His trial, scourged,



mocked and hit by Roman soldiers, and finally crucified (Luke 22:63-65; Matthew 26:67-68; 27:26, 29-30, 35).

Two of these punishments—the Roman scourging and crucifixion—were particularly brutal and cruel. Bible students today may not fully grasp the barbarity of either. We'll take a brief look at each to gain a greater appreciation for the sacrifice Christ made on our behalf.

## What was a scourging?

Roman lictors administered the scourging, which inflicted far more pain and damage to the body than a lashing or whipping. It was designed to inflict massive tissue damage and to rip open the victim's flesh.

After stripping the condemned individual to expose the flesh of the prisoner's back, buttocks and legs, Roman lictors began the scourging.

The Romans used a *flagellum* (also called a *flagrum*) to scourge prisoners. Attached to the wooden handle were several strips of leather interwoven with pieces of metal and bone.

The metal pummeled the body, inflicting bruising under the skin. The jagged animal bone, on the other hand, shredded the flesh. A medical analysis published in 1965 provides a disturbing picture:

“At first the heavy thongs cut through the skin only. Then, as the blows continue, they are cut deeper into the subcutaneous tissues, producing first an oozing of blood from the capillaries and veins of the skin, and finally spurting arterial bleeding from vessels in the underlying muscles” (C. Truman Davis, M.D., M.S., “The Passion of Christ From a Medical Point of View,” *Arizona Medicine*).

## Death by crucifixion

As savage as the Roman scourging was, the crucifixion was even worse. This punishment was intended to ensure a slow, agonizing death. The English language preserves this concept in the word *excruciating*, which refers to intense pain. It comes from the Latin prefix *ex*, meaning “from,” and *crux*, meaning “cross.”

Crucifixion was designed to leave the victim struggling between two agonizing choices. The position of the body with the arms above the head made it difficult for a victim to exhale, but pushing himself up to breathe involved even more searing pain where the nails pierced through his flesh.

As a result, the individual was continually forced to choose between not being able to breathe and experiencing extreme pain. Depending on how severe the person's scourging was, death might occur within hours, or it might not occur for days.

A number of factors contributed to death, but “the most important factor was progressive asphyxia caused by impairment of respiratory movement” ([pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov](https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov)). (For more about this horrific punishment, see our article “[The Crucifixion of Jesus](#).”)

## “The Son of Man must suffer”

While teaching on the shores of the Sea of Galilee long before His last Passover, Christ had confided to His disciples that “the Son of Man must suffer many things” (Luke 9:22). He made a similar statement while on His way to Jerusalem (Luke 17:25).

Why did Jesus insist that He *must* suffer? It is clear throughout the New Testament that Jesus had to die for our sins, but did He really have to suffer so much as well?

In the modern Western world, executions are rare, and they are usually carried out in ways designed to minimize suffering. Executions of even the most violent criminals, for example, might be by lethal injections intended to make death quick and painless.

So why would a merciful and loving God allow His sinless Son to suffer such agonizing abuse?

## The horror of sin

The tremendous agony of our Lord and Savior was necessary to demonstrate the consequences of sin. Ultimately, of course, sin leads to death (James 1:15), but sinners and those around them also suffer along the way.

Jesus' death was terribly severe to demonstrate the absolute dreadfulness of sin.

The world has been full of pain since Adam and Eve disobeyed God by eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Genesis 3:1-6). Their sin brought a curse on the world (verses 16-19).

In his letter to the church at Rome, Paul wrote about this curse and the resulting pain. While discussing "the sufferings of this present time," he explained that "the creation was subjected to futility" (Romans 8:18, 20).

Alluding to the curse in Genesis 3, Paul personified creation as a woman suffering through childbirth. He wrote that "the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs" (Romans 8:22).

## Perfect through sufferings

Humans have endured violence since Cain murdered his brother Abel (Genesis 4:8). That tragedy is recorded just a few verses after the account of God's judgment on Adam and Eve for eating the forbidden fruit.

Among the myriad atrocities we have inflicted on one another are the Spanish Inquisition (from the late 15th century to the early 19th century), the Holocaust (genocide of European Jews during World War II) and the "killing fields" of the Khmer Rouge in the 1970s.

Anyone who survived horrors such as these had to wrestle with a lifetime of emotional pain as well. Clearly, humanity needs a Savior who understands suffering, not just theoretically, but experientially.

Our Savior does understand because of what He experienced through scourging and crucifixion. God made "the captain of [our] salvation perfect through sufferings" (Hebrews 2:10). Jesus, our High Priest, can sympathize with our weaknesses (Hebrews 4:15).

## No greater love

There is another reason for the tremendous suffering Christ endured. When we look at what Jesus willingly suffered, we begin to see the tremendous love He has for us, as well as the love of the Father in giving "His only begotten Son" (John 3:16).

It wasn't easy. Knowing in advance what was in store for Him, Jesus prayed fervently, asking the Father, "If it is possible, let this cup pass from Me" (Matthew 26:39). His prayer was so passionate that "His sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground" (Luke 22:44).

Christ did not lay down His life unaware of the pain He would endure. Even so, each time He prayed that the Father might let the cup of suffering pass from Him, He added, "Nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will."

Thus He was fully committed to His supreme act of sacrificial love.

Peter wrote about the suffering of Christ, "who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness—by whose stripes you were healed" (1 Peter 2:24).

As Jesus told His disciples, no love is greater "than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends" (John 15:13). When we comprehend the horror of the scourging and crucifixion, we come to a greater appreciation of that love.

## Breaking bread in remembrance

When Jesus broke bread, telling His disciples that it symbolized His body and coming death, He also told them to do the same "in remembrance of Me" (1 Corinthians 11:24). Christians are to call this tremendous sacrifice to mind when partaking of the bread at the New Testament Passover service. (Study further in our online articles "[Passover in the New Testament](#)" and "[I Am the Bread of Life](#).")

This is a sober reminder of the suffering sin causes, but it is also an encouraging reminder of the immeasurable depth of Christ's great love for humanity.

Like the apostle Paul, we can be "persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 8:38-39). ◉



# Is Manifesting Biblical?

Once primarily an obscure New Age idea, manifesting has become mainstream and some have even tried to “Christianize” it. But is manifestation a biblical idea?

*By Erik Jones*

**W**here do good and positive things in your life come from? One popular answer is *manifestation*.

Though it has grown in popularity in recent years through the New Age and self-help movements, its roots go back much further, drawing heavily on Eastern religion and philosophy.

But what exactly is manifesting? Is it compatible with the Bible? And should Christians use manifestation techniques to try to reach their goals and improve their lives?

## What is manifesting?

Manifesting is the idea that you can bring success and positive outcomes into your life by deeply and deliberately focusing your thoughts and emotions on what you are trying to achieve or have.

The core idea is that your thoughts and feelings influence your reality. By deliberately directing your mind toward what you desire

(often by vividly visualizing it, feeling the emotions of already having it and acting as if it's already yours), you align yourself with that outcome and “manifest” it into happening.

In this sense, manifesting is attempting to turn a thought or desire into a tangible reality through focused intention.

## How does manifestation supposedly work?

According to those who teach manifestation, the power to transform thoughts into reality lies within the mind itself. Many will describe the human mind as having inherent power to shape reality. Thoughts are viewed as energy that creates reality.

“Thoughts become things. If you see it in your mind, you will hold it in your hand.” That’s the saying commonly attributed to Bob Proctor (1934-2022), author of *You Were Born Rich*.

Those who teach manifesting will usually break it down into four basic techniques:

1. Visualize what you want in detail.
2. Speak positive affirmations that articulate precisely what you want or what you desire to be.
3. Create a vision board (a collage) with imagery of what you desire, and look at it daily.
4. Act and conduct yourself as if you already have what you desire.

So, for instance, if a woman has the goal of getting married and having a family with two children, she would:

1. Create a clear mental image of that future family and think about it often.
2. Speak affirmations such as “I am deserving of love,” “I will meet my future spouse at the perfect time,” and “I am grateful for the family I will have,” and try to generate the feeling of being loved, as if she already has this family.
3. Construct a vision board that includes pictures of happy couples and families that she can look at and then visualize those families as being her own.
4. Think, feel and speak as if she has already found her spouse and they have children.

The idea of manifesting is closely connected to other popular philosophies, such as the Law of Attraction.

The Law of Attraction attempts to explain how manifesting works by teaching that thoughts create energy that emanates into the universe, and that those thoughts act like magnets, attracting positive or negative energy back in kind.

So, suppose a person sends positive thoughts into the universe (“I will get married and live happily ever after”). In that case, he or she would magnetically attract positive energy back—“attracting” the marriage and family the person desired.

This idea was popularized by the book *The Secret*, which was later adapted into a movie.

(To examine the biblical perspective on this philosophy, read [“Is the Law of Attraction Biblical?”](#))

While some manifestation teachings, like this one, present the universe as the source of positive consequences, others attribute them to the inherent power of the human mind. And some subtly present it in biblical terms—as a human power that comes from God.

## Manifestation presented as a “Christian” idea

In recent years, some within the mainstream Christian community have attempted to syncretize manifestation philosophy and techniques with biblical concepts.

For instance, some openly claim to teach “Christian manifestation techniques” or to be a “Christian manifestation coach.”

However, sometimes the ideas are presented more subtly, using scriptural or religious language to obscure and distance them from obvious New Age or metaphysical terminology.

Here are some examples of popular books that have done this:

- *The Secret Power of Speaking God’s Word*, by Joyce Meyer. One of the video presentations connected with this book explains her teaching this way: “Your words hold incredible power! Today, Joyce reveals how the things you say can impact your life in

profound ways. Learn how to align your words with God's truth to create the positive change you've been looking for." The basic premise is to use Scripture as the source of positive affirmation statements. The idea is that you will receive the blessings you want by speaking scriptures about them.

- *You Can, You Will* and *The Power of I Am*, by Joel Osteen. In the first book, Mr. Osteen teaches that visualization techniques are key to unlocking your potential and that the gifts already inherent in you can be activated by envisioning who you want to be and maintaining a positive mindset. In the second book, Mr. Osteen presents affirmations as a way of receiving the blessings God wants for you. His Amazon book description gives these examples: "So, when you go through the day saying: 'I am blessed' . . . blessings pursue you. 'I am talented' . . . talent follows you. 'I am healthy' . . . health heads your way. 'I am strong' . . . strength tracks you down."
- *The Law of Confession*, by Bill Winston. In this book, Mr. Winston uses the biblical term *confession* to teach his idea that our spoken words (or confessions) shape our reality. So, suppose you want to manifest a specific biblical principle. In that case, you confess the principle out loud and then meditate on it—and the principle will eventually be manifested into your life.

The truth is that these teachers are subtly using biblical language to disguise New Age philosophies.

- *Faith* and *belief* are reframed as a powerful force you can tap into to achieve your dreams and desires.
- *Prayer* is taught as a way to declare your desires in order to receive them.
- *Meditation* is framed as the practice of focusing your mind on your intended goal or desire.
- *Gratitude* is presented as a way to shift your focus from negative to positive by generating the feeling of already having what you desire, creating the emotional frequency that supposedly brings it into reality.
- *Claiming God's promises* is used to describe the process of manifesting the positive

things you desire. These verbal declarations of the promises you wish to receive substitute for affirmations.

- *Positive thinking* is imbued with the power to achieve desires.
- *Blessings* are equated with the things one desires to have, and that can be manifested through the mind or the universe.

Using biblical language in place of New Age terms can lead sincere people to adopt unbiblical ideas without realizing it, believing they are practicing something rooted in Scripture.

The key to avoiding these subtle substitutions is not just recognizing the original ideas but also developing a strong understanding of biblical terms in their proper scriptural context.

## **Beware of misusing biblical terms**

Biblical positivity, vision, gratitude and meditation are not techniques for manifesting our desires. In Scripture, these are virtues and spiritual disciplines to help us look to God and build His character.

Instead of being positive in order to "send out good energy" and attract desired outcomes, be positive because it is a key to thinking like your Creator (Philippians 4:8).

Instead of developing a "vision" to manifest your desires, set clear goals that align with God's will. Then direct your preparation, focus and effort toward accomplishing these goals instead of aimlessly floating through life.

Instead of practicing gratitude for things you don't yet have in order to "bring them into reality," be thankful to God for His blessings as an expression of sincere appreciation (1 Thessalonians 5:18).

Instead of meditating to visualize your desires into existence, meditate to fix your mind on God—His Word, His ways and His truth (Psalm 119:97-99).

The Bible contains a treasury of wisdom for success and growth—both physical and spiritual. Christians do not need to look to distorted New Age ideas or Eastern spirituality for guidance.

## Why manifestation and the Bible are incompatible

There are two core biblical problems with manifestation philosophies.

First, the idea of manifestation holds that the brain emits energy or frequencies that can interact with the universe and shape reality. However, this idea is not only lacking scientific support—it has no basis in Scripture.

Though the human mind is a remarkable creation of God, the Bible shows that it influences the physical world only through the body's actions. (To learn more about the amazing human mind, read [“What Does the Bible Say About the Mind?”](#) and [“The Miracle in the Mind.”](#))

God is described as having the inherent power to change reality through merely His thoughts or words (Genesis 1:3; Psalm 33:6-9; Hebrews 1:3; 11:3).

The idea that human beings can shape reality through their thoughts or emotions is a subtle attempt to give humankind an ability that belongs to God. It is simply another example of humanity's recurring effort to assume divine powers apart from God.

Second, manifestation is almost entirely built on personal desires. It is about bending the universe to *your* will to get what *you* desire or to fulfill *your* dreams. Much of manifesting literature appeals to the human proclivity toward covetousness and ease—by promising simple and mystical techniques to achieve what you want.

But God's way of life, as revealed in the Bible, is not centered on manifesting and receiving your dreams, but obeying the [will of God](#) and aligning your life with His purpose for you. That purpose is not necessarily individual and based on your own dreams, but is based on living in faithful obedience to His way of life.

To explore this further, read [“Does God Have a Specific Will for Your Life?”](#)

## The biblical approach to achieving your goals

The Bible isn't against our having goals or striving for personal achievement—as long as those goals don't contradict God's law. God wants His people to pursue excellence and to succeed in their endeavors.

But the biblical path to success is not mystical

or metaphysical. It's practical and disciplined:

### 1. Set goals and plan.

Goal setting isn't a “manifesting technique”; it is a tool to help us direct our decisions and efforts toward achieving our objectives. Goals help us make decisions and plans that align with our purpose. Proverbs 21:5 teaches, “The plans of the diligent lead surely to abundance” (English Standard Version). And Matthew 6:33 encourages us to “seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness” as the basis for setting Christian goals.

### 2. Seek education and preparation.

Achievement requires preparation. Scripture defines a wise person as one who eagerly seeks knowledge, understanding and instruction (Proverbs 1:5; 4:7; 18:15; 23:12). There are no shortcuts to success that can bypass education and preparation.

### 3. Work hard.

Success does not come from merely thinking and feeling, but from disciplined effort. Thoughts shape reality only when they direct action and effort. Scripture repeatedly emphasizes the need for diligence: “The soul of a lazy man desires, and has nothing; but the soul of the diligent shall be made rich” (Proverbs 13:4). Desire accomplishes nothing without diligent effort.

### 4. Seek God's guidance and blessing.

Help does not come from the universe or from powers within us. It comes from the God who made us and the universe. “In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths” (Proverbs 3:6). When we align our lives with His will, He blesses us according to *His* purpose. Prayer is not a technique to get what we want—it is a means of drawing close to God and seeking His will (1 John 5:14-15).

These are biblical keys to genuine success—confirmed by Scripture and experience.

Beware of philosophies such as manifestation, which promise effortless results or encourage reliance on one's own inner power. And be extra cautious when such ideas are gilded in misused biblical language.

True success flows from wisdom, diligence and dependence on God—not the human mind or the powers of the universe.

To explore more biblical principles of success, read [“How to Be Successful.”](#) 



# What's Behind *Discern*?

Who are the people behind *Discern* magazine? Why do we provide this biblical resource to you with no cost or obligation?

*By Erik Jones and David Treybig*

**T**ens of thousands of subscribers receive each issue of *Discern*. We care about each of you, and we would be happy to hear more about you and what you want from the magazine. And we imagine some of you may also want to know more about us.

## **The people behind *Discern***

You can see the names in our staff box, and even scroll to the end of our articles online to see our authors' biographies. But those names are just a few of the

thousands of committed Christians who provide this magazine for you.

*Discern* is sponsored by the Church of God, a Worldwide Association, which is committed to upholding the teachings of the early New Testament Church.

Members of the Church of God, a Worldwide Association (known affectionately as COGWA), form a community of believers around the world who are joined together by authentic biblical teaching and God's Spirit. They attend church services on the seventh-day Sabbath each week to worship God and learn His truth.

The Church's membership spans more than 60 countries around the globe. From large congregations in major cities like Houston, Texas, and Santiago,

Chile, to isolated individuals and families in places like Indonesia and Greece, the Church truly is a *worldwide* association of people from various cultures and speaking many languages.

## The mission of the Church

After Jesus' resurrection, He appeared to His disciples and instructed them on the spiritual work to be done. His command was: "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age" (Matthew 28:19-20).

Mark's account includes, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature" (Mark 16:15).

This twofold responsibility of preaching the gospel (the good news) of the Kingdom of God and caring for the called-out disciples (students) of Jesus—teaching them to practice the same authentic truths He taught His first disciples—remains the commission of His Church.

We are dedicated to fulfilling the biblical mandate to preach the truth of God's coming Kingdom to the entire world. Our congregations are found throughout the world, and we welcome all who desire to learn about and practice the teachings Jesus Christ gave to His first disciples.

## How we proclaim the good news around the world

In addition to *Discern* magazine, we produce a wide variety of other biblical and Christian living resources to help fulfill our mission of preaching the gospel of the Kingdom of God.

To maximize our effectiveness, COGWA launched the [LifeHopeandTruth.com](http://LifeHopeandTruth.com) website in 2012 with the goal of making the true gospel accessible around the globe through the Internet. LifeHopeandTruth.com now contains thousands of pages of content explaining the many truths of God's Word. Millions of people around the world access the Life, Hope & Truth website every year.

We invite you to explore the site's massive library of biblical content. The site features six silos (God, Bible,

Life, Prophecy, Change and Relationships) that help organize and simplify browsing through our material. You can access the vast array of content by browsing or by using the search box at the top of every page.

Additionally, you'll find a regularly updated [blog](#) with posts covering biblical themes, world news, social issues and other topics related to living God's way in today's world. If you'd like to be notified when new content is posted, visit our [Subscribe](#) page.

Our website is also available in Spanish ([VidaEsperanzayVerdad.org](http://VidaEsperanzayVerdad.org)) and French ([VieEspoiretVerite.org](http://VieEspoiretVerite.org)).

LifeHopeandTruth.com also features a Learning Center filled with in-depth content designed to help you become a better student of the Bible. This section includes:

- [Booklets](#) and [Study Guides](#). We currently offer more than 25 free booklets and study guides explaining key biblical topics in great depth. Many of our booklets are also available in audio form on our [Audio Books](#) page.
- [The LHT Bible Study Course](#). This is an interactive personal study course that systematically guides students through 11 core biblical themes and teaches skills and strategies for personal Bible study. The course is also available in [Spanish](#).
- [Journeys](#). These collections of daily readings are designed to guide you through important biblical concepts, from the problem of evil to the armor of God.
- [Parents & Kids Resources](#). Our [Encourage, Equip & Inspire](#) program includes scores of lessons designed to aid parents in teaching God's Word to their children.

In addition to our written content, we also offer video and audio content on multiple platforms:

- [Life, Hope & Truth Presents](#). Our biweekly flagship video program features experienced ministers presenting a range of biblically based topics in an engaging and authoritative manner. This program can also be viewed on the [Life, Hope & Truth YouTube](#) page.
- [Verse by Verse Podcast](#). This podcast features short insights and explanations of various verses in the Bible. New episodes are regularly posted on all major podcast platforms.
- [Answers From the Gospels](#). These short videos provide concise explanations of biblical questions

that can be answered from the Gospel accounts of Jesus Christ's life.

- Other video series. These cover a variety of biblical topics in short and approachable video segments. You can watch videos on the [10 Commandments](#), [Feasts of the Lord](#), [Life After Death](#) and the [Sabbath](#). Just as Jesus sent out His disciples with the command “freely you have received, freely give” (Matthew 10:8), so we make all of our material available free of charge.

## Biblical beliefs

We believe the Bible teaches that the Church that Jesus built will maintain the beliefs of the New Testament Church. The biblical church:

1. Uses the name *Church of God* (Acts 20:28; 1 Corinthians 10:32; 11:16, 22; 15:9; 2 Corinthians 1:1; Galatians 1:13; 1 Thessalonians 2:14; 2 Thessalonians 1:4; and 1 Timothy 3:5, 15).
2. Bases its doctrines on the Word of God (2 Timothy 3:16-17).
3. Teaches and practices obedience to the 10 Commandments (Matthew 19:17; 1 John 2:3; Revelation 12:17). Jesus said that many who profess His name would “practice lawlessness”—ignoring or disobeying God’s laws (Matthew 7:21-23). This is why we emphasize the necessity of obeying God’s 10 Commandments.
4. Observes God’s weekly (seventh-day) Sabbath and the annual biblical festivals (Exodus 20:8-11; Leviticus 23; Mark 2:27-28; 1 Corinthians 5:8). While most churches today celebrate holidays like Christmas and Easter, we abstain from these humanly devised religious holidays (Deuteronomy 12:30; Matthew 15:9; Romans 12:2).
5. Teaches the necessity of growing in God’s character (Matthew 5:48; 7:20; 2 Peter 3:18). Some churches teach a “come as you are” version of Christianity, but we emphasize the need to continually grow in godly character, just as Paul stressed in Ephesians 4:13.
6. Genuinely loves one another and shows that love through service (John 13:34-35; Galatians 6:10; 1 Peter 1:22).
7. Is driven by the mission to preach the true gospel to the world and make disciples of all nations (Matthew 24:14; 28:19-20).

To learn more about our beliefs, download our booklet [Fundamental Beliefs of the Church of God, a Worldwide Association](#). For more insight into the Bible’s

teachings on the characteristics of the true Church and its history through the ages, download our free booklet [Where Is the Church Jesus Built?](#)

## How we care for the church

Our weekly Sabbath services are primarily educational in focus and typically feature two scripturally based messages. Every Saturday, we hold scheduled services in more than 200 congregations worldwide.

In addition to keeping the weekly Sabbath, members of the Church observe God’s annual festivals, which progressively explain His plan of salvation for mankind (Leviticus 23). You can learn more about these special observances in our free booklet [From Holidays to Holy Days: God’s Plan for You](#).

The Church of God has historically placed a heavy emphasis on education—including educational opportunities for youth, young adults and adults.

## Foundation Outreach International

COGWA also supports humanitarian projects throughout the world by supporting a nonprofit organization called Foundation Outreach International (FOI). FOI operates as a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization, making it tax-exempt in the United States.

As explained on FOI’s website, “The mission of Foundation Outreach International (FOI) is to provide aid, support, and volunteers for humanitarian and educational projects around the world. The emphasis is on projects that build character, develop leaders, and promote a better quality of life, especially for youth and young adults.”

You can learn more about Foundation Outreach International, its mission and the humanitarian efforts it sponsors at its website, [foundationoutreachintl.org](http://foundationoutreachintl.org).

## For more information

This article is adapted from our booklet [Welcome to the Church of God, a Worldwide Association](#). Download a free copy for more information. If you have any questions, feel free to use our “[Ask a Question](#)” service or contact our pastor nearest you using the information on our “[Congregations](#)” page. 📍

# ARE WE IN THE BIBLICAL END TIMES?

## End-Time Topics

- 1 What Will Happen?
- 2 Signs of the Times
- 3 Are We in the End Times?
- 4 What Is Coming?
- 5 Return of Christ

[LifeHopeandTruth.com/prophecy/end-times](http://LifeHopeandTruth.com/prophecy/end-times)