

The **Bible** Unpacked

Comprehensive Study Series

The Bible's teaching compiled
for established believers

Paul Mallison

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The Bible's teaching compiled
for established believers

18. God's Transformation of His People

Paul Mallison

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A Quick Word

This series of studies aims to present a compilation of the Bible's teachings in a clear and readable order. There are 40 booklets in the series, based on the 40 chapters of the book *The Bible Unpacked - Comprehensive Edition*. Each booklet has two sections, which can be used for two or more studies.

The material contains Bible verses. Before the verses are headings, which reflect what the verses say – in particular the parts of the verses in *italics*. The verses are sometimes followed by a comment.

The verses often have a brief introduction. Usually these state who is speaking and often who they are speaking to. Apart from God and Jesus Christ, the main speakers are:

- Moses – who lead the Israelites and taught them God's laws;
- David – Israel's greatest king who wrote many of the psalms, most of which are essentially prayers;
- Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel and other prophets – who spoke to the people of Israel on God's behalf; and
- Paul, Peter, John and other leaders of the early church – who spoke to various groups and wrote letters to believers.

Much care has been taken in order to correctly interpret the verses. Nevertheless, if you encounter a verse that is used to teach something that is contrary to or goes beyond your understanding, assess its use by doing such things as: reading the passage it is from; and considering how its teaching fits in with Scripture as a whole (e.g. interpret OT teaching in the light of NT teaching).

For more information on *The Bible Unpacked* and free downloads, go to the website: www.thebibleunpacked.net.

Users are asked to pray regularly for persecuted Christians and, if possible, support them financially. These things can be done through organizations that provide aid to them and/or prayer notices, such as those listed under [Persecuted Christians](#).

Suggestions for Study Groups

Preliminary matters:

- Beforehand the leader should: check the context of any verses they are not familiar with; and review the questions. If need be, they should compose questions more applicable to the group.
- Each person should have a Bible, for things such as checking a verse's context. It would also be helpful to have Bible commentaries on hand.
- Pray before beginning the study. Ask God for help in understanding the meaning of the verses and to affect your lives through them. Also pray together at the end.

Doing the study:

- Ideally, read the material and answer the questions prior to the meeting. Then share answers and discuss any issues arising from the material in the meeting.
- Alternatively, read the material and answer the questions in the meeting – reading either aloud as a group or individually (prior to sharing answers). If reading as a group, **try having one person read the headings, another read the verses and another read the comments.** Additionally, a fourth person could read the Bible references.

General or concluding questions:

If time permits, conclude with one or more of the following questions:

- What is something that you either: **did not know** before; gained **greater insight** into; or **needed reminding** of?
- What verse would be helpful to memorize and bear in mind during the next week?
- In taking the verses seriously, is there anything you should change in:
 - (a) how you relate to God and/or to other people; or
 - (b) any other area of your life (e.g. attitudes, values or behavior)?

If so, are there any specific steps you could take to do this?

I. General

God transforms his people by giving them the invaluable gift of spiritual life, in which they are “reborn” in a spiritual sense. Additionally, God makes them holy and accordingly begins to transform them to be like Jesus Christ and himself. God does this through such things as teaching and disciplining them.

a) God Makes His People Spiritually Alive

God's people have spiritual life

JOHN 6:63 [JESUS, TO HIS FOLLOWERS:] *The Spirit is the one who gives life; human nature is of no help! The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and are life.* NET

Jesus' words together with the Holy Spirit bring life. This spiritual life involves being "alive to God" (Romans 6:11) and comes through having God's Holy Spirit. Each believer has the Holy Spirit dwelling in them, renewing and nourishing them spiritually. Consequently believers have a spiritual consciousness that enables them to live in communion with and in dependence on God. As such they are "alive to God".

One could make a parallel with a person's own spirit enabling them to have physical life (for without one's spirit indwelling one's physical body, the body is dead). Somewhat similarly, having the Holy Spirit enables a person to have spiritual life.

They have passed from their former state of spiritual death to spiritual life

1JN 3:14 [JOHN, TO BELIEVERS:] *We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brothers. Whoever does not love abides in death.* ESV

In union with Jesus Christ, their sinful selves have "died" and they are now spiritually alive

ROM 6:6–8, 11 [PAUL, TO BELIEVERS:] *We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. ⁷For one who has died has been set free from sin. ⁸Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. ... ¹¹So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.* ESV

In our union with Jesus Christ we are identified with him in his death and resurrection. In a spiritual sense our old sinful selves have died with him in his death and we have been made alive spiritually with him in his post-resurrection life.

God's people are spiritually reborn of God . . .

JOHN 1:12-13 But to all who have received him [Jesus] – those who believe in his name – he has given the right to become God's children ¹³– *children not born by human parents or by human desire or a husband's decision, but by God.* NET

References to being born by God (v. 13) – or born again – refer to the spiritual rebirth people undergo when they come to faith, and by which they have spiritual life. It is accomplished by God through the work of the Holy Spirit within a person's heart or mind, along with exposure to God's word. This spiritual birth means that believers are in a real sense children of God. It also begins a process of growing more like God, as believers share in his Spirit which transforms them.

. . . They are born again of the Holy Spirit and through God's word

JOHN 3:6-7 [JESUS:] *A person is born physically of human parents, but is born spiritually of the Spirit.* ⁷Do not be surprised because I tell you that you *must all be born again.* GNT

JAMES 1:18 [JAMES, TO BELIEVERS:] By his sovereign plan *he gave us birth through the message of truth*, that we would be a kind of firstfruits of all he created. NET

God's people are a new creation

2COR 5:17 So then, *if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; what is old has passed away – look, what is new has come!* NET

Explain the spiritual "life" that the New Testament speaks of, as if you were talking to a new believer.

How is this life given to Christians?

In what ways are Christians a new creation (2 Corinthians 5:17)? What old things have gone?

Pray for persecuted Christians

b) God Makes His People Holy

See also:

- *The Holy Spirit makes God's people holy*, Ch. 17

The concept of being made holy concerns God's people being set apart for God - dedicated to him, for such purposes as doing his work and worshipping him. This involves them being made pure from sin.

Being made holy has a couple of phases or facets. Firstly, when a person comes to faith their sins are forgiven, and as such they are holy. Secondly, believers are made holy in that they are continually being transformed by God, becoming more like Jesus Christ and increasingly devoid of sin. This process is often referred to as "sanctification".

God makes his people holy . . .

EX 31:13 [GOD, TO MOSES:] Tell the Israelites, 'Surely you must keep my Sabbaths, for it is a sign between me and you throughout your generations, that you may know that *I am the LORD who sanctifies you*. NET

1THES 5:23-24 [PAUL, TO BELIEVERS:] Now *may the God of peace himself make you completely holy and may your spirit and soul and body be kept entirely blameless* at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. ²⁴He who calls you is trustworthy, and *he will in fact do this*. NET

. . . God's people are a holy people

1COR 3:17B For *God's temple is holy, and you are that temple*. ESV

God's "temple" is the church.

God's people are primarily made holy through Jesus Christ's sacrifice

HEB 13:12 So *Jesus also suffered outside the city to make his people holy with his own blood*. NCV™

God's people are being made like God . . .

COL 3:9–10 [PAUL, TO THE COLOSSIAN BELIEVERS:] Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices¹⁰ and have put on *the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator.* ESV

. . . God's people are being transformed to be like Jesus Christ

2COR 3:18B [PAUL, TO BELIEVERS:] *We all show the Lord's glory, and we are being changed to be like him.* NCV™

Paul has the development of the believer's sanctification in view, with their characters growing more like Christ. As such believers increasingly reflect and even manifest Christ's glory.

Note: God's people are his workmanship

EPH 2:10 [PAUL, TO BELIEVERS:] *For we are his workmanship, having been created in Christ Jesus for good works that God prepared beforehand so we may do them.* NET

To what extent or in what sense are believers made "completely holy and ... entirely blameless" (1Thes 5:23)?

What changes are you seeing in yourself, compared to before you became a Christian? What are your "growing edges"?

What is one aspect of Jesus Christ's character that you need to imitate better? How can you make yourself more open to God transforming you to be like Jesus Christ in this way?

Pray for persecuted Christians

c) God Teaches His People

See also:

- *The Holy Spirit teaches God's people . . .*, Ch. 17
- *. . . The Holy Spirit teaches God's people about all things*, Ch. 17
- *d) Wisdom and Knowledge*, p. 27

God teaches his people

JOHN 6:45 [JESUS:] It is written in the prophets, *'They will all be taught by God.'* Everyone who listens to the Father and learns from him comes to me. NCV™

PHIL 3:15 [PAUL, TO BELIEVERS:] All of us who are spiritually mature should think this way, too. And *if there are things you do not agree with, God will make them clear to you.* NCV™

God teaches his people how to live

Ps 25:9 *He shows those who are humble how to do right, and he teaches them his ways.* NCV™

Ps 32:8 [GOD:] *I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will counsel you with my eye upon you.* ESV

God enables his people to know the truth

JOHN 8:31–32 Then Jesus said to those Judeans who had believed him, *"If you continue to follow my teaching, you are really my disciples ³²and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."* NET

God makes known things about himself to his people . . .

Ps 103:7 *He made known his ways to Moses, his acts to the people of Israel.* ESV

ISA 43:10 The LORD says [to Israel], *"You are my witnesses and the servant I chose. I chose you so you would know and believe me, so you would understand that I am the true God. There was no God before me, and there will be no God after me.* NCV™

. . . and God makes known other things of his to his people

EPH 1:17–19 [PAUL, TO BELIEVERS:] *I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you spiritual wisdom and revelation in your growing knowledge of him,* ¹⁸– since the eyes of your heart have been enlightened – *so that you may know what is the hope of his calling, what is the wealth of his glorious inheritance in the saints,* ¹⁹*and what is the incomparable greatness of his power toward us who believe, as displayed in the exercise of his immense strength.* NET

The fact that Paul prays that the Ephesians would know these things is indicative that he saw God as ultimately the source of such knowledge.

God reveals unknown and concealed things to his people

ISA 48:6B [GOD, TO HIS PEOPLE:] *From this point on I am announcing to you new events that are previously unrevealed and you do not know about.* NET

1COR 2:9–10 [PAUL, TO BELIEVERS:] But just as it is written, “*Things that no eye has seen, or ear heard, or mind imagined, are the things God has prepared for those who love him.*” ¹⁰*God has revealed these to us by the Spirit.* For the Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God. NET

How does God teach his people?

What things would you like God to teach you more about?

How can you make yourself more open to God teaching you?

Pray for persecuted Christians

d) God Disciplines His People (I): Reasons

When his people turn to sin, God punishes and disciplines them . . .

JER 30:14B [GOD, TO ISRAEL:] I have attacked you like an enemy; *your punishment has been harsh because your sins are many and your wickedness is great.* GNT

Ps 39:11 [DAVID, TO GOD:] *You correct and punish people for their sins ...* NCV™

. . . By punishment and discipline God causes his people to seek him again

Hos 5:14–15 [GOD:] I will be like a lion to Ephraim, like a young lion to the house of Judah. *I myself will tear them to pieces, then I will carry them off, and no one will be able to rescue them!* ¹⁵Then I will return again to my lair until they have suffered their punishment. *Then they will seek me; in their distress they will earnestly seek me.*

NET

God disciplines his people to rid them of sin

Ps 119:67 [A PSALMIST, TO GOD:] *Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I keep your word.* ESV

God disciplines them to save them from sin's consequences

1COR 11:32 [PAUL, TO BELIEVERS:] *But when we are judged by the Lord, we are disciplined so that we may not be condemned with the world.*

NET

ISA 38:17 [HEZEKIAH, TO GOD:] *Look, the grief I experienced was for my benefit. You delivered me from the pit of oblivion. For you removed all my sins from your sight.* NET

Here Hezekiah speaks of a time of intense suffering, which he attributes to God's punishment or discipline for sin. His words point to the fact that those who respond appropriately to God's discipline are forgiven for their sins and no longer face destruction.

However, hard times from God are not always due to sin

Ps 44:14, 17, 22 [A PSALMIST, TO GOD:] *You have made us an object of contempt among the nations; they shake their heads at us in scorn. ... ¹⁷All this has happened to us, even though we have not forgotten you or broken the covenant you made with us. ... ²²But it is on your account that we are being killed all the time, that we are treated like sheep to be slaughtered.* GNT

Not only was the people's suffering from God not due to sin, but it was because of their faithfulness to him that they were looked upon as objects suitable for abuse and even death (v. 22). This illustrates that discipline or suffering is not necessarily due to sin. Often the reason may in fact not be apparent.

God also tests his people to show if they will obey him

DEUT 8:2 [MOSES, TO THE ISRAELITES:] *Remember how the LORD your God led you all the way these 40 years in the desert, to humble and test you in order to make known what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep his commands.* ISV

Further reasons why God disciplines and tests his people

HEB 12:9–11 [THE WRITER, TO BELIEVERS:] *On earth we have fathers who disciplined us, and we respect them. Shouldn't we place ourselves under the authority of God, the father of spirits, so that we will live? ¹⁰For a short time our fathers disciplined us as they thought best. Yet, God disciplines us for our own good so that we can become holy like him. ¹¹We don't enjoy being disciplined. It always seems to cause more pain than joy. But later on, those who learn from that discipline have peace that comes from doing what is right.* GW

JAMES 1:2–3 [JAMES, TO BELIEVERS:] *My brothers and sisters, consider it nothing but joy when you fall into all sorts of trials, ³because you know that the testing of your faith produces endurance.* NET

What are some reasons why God allows his people to experience difficult times? (Do not limit your answer to just what is mentioned in the verses.)

Is all hardship in the lives of believers due to God's discipline and testing? If not, how can we discern if particular hardship is or not?

Have you experienced any times of discipline or testing that you can look back on and say were "for my benefit" (Isa 38:17)?

Pray for persecuted Christians

e) God Disciplines His People (II): Insights

God disciplines his people as his children, who he loves

HEB 12:5–8 [THE WRITER, TO BELIEVERS:] And have you forgotten *the exhortation addressed to you as sons?* “My son, do not scorn the Lord’s discipline or give up when he corrects you. ⁶”For the Lord disciplines the one he loves and chastises every son he accepts.” ⁷Endure your suffering as discipline; God is treating you as sons. For what son is there that a father does not discipline? ⁸But if you do not experience discipline, something all sons have shared in, then you are illegitimate and are not sons. NET

God’s discipline is characterized by righteousness and faithfulness

NEH 9:30–31, 33 [LEVITES, PRAYING TO GOD AND MAKING REFERENCE TO THEIR FOREFATHERS:] You prolonged your kindness with them for many years, and you solemnly admonished them by your Spirit through your prophets. *Still they paid no attention, so you delivered them into the hands of the neighboring peoples.* ³¹However, due to your abundant mercy you did not do away with them altogether; you did not abandon them. For you are a merciful and compassionate God. ... ³³You are righteous with regard to all that has happened to us, for you have acted faithfully. It is we who have been in the wrong! NET

As well as speaking of his patience and mercy, vv. 30–31 beautifully illustrate God’s righteousness and faithfulness in his discipline and dealings with his people, affirmed in v. 33.

God’s punishment of his people is warranted . . .

EZEK 16:59 *Jerusalem, you deserve to be punished, because you broke your promises and ignored our agreement.* CEV

EZEK 14:23 [GOD, TO EZEKIEL:] They will console you when you see their behavior and their deeds, because *you will know that it was not without reason that I have done everything which I have done in it,* declares the sovereign LORD. NET

God assured Ezekiel that when he saw the ungodliness of those who had remained in Jerusalem, he would realize that God had done nothing in his destruction of it without good reason.

. . . and God's punishment is often less than what his people's sins really deserve

EZRA 9:13 [EZRA, TO GOD:] After all that has happened to us because of our evil behavior, and because of our great sin—considering that *you our God have punished us less than our iniquities deserve* and have given us this deliverance— ... ISV

God's discipline is temporary . . .

Ps 30:5 *His anger lasts only a moment, but his kindness lasts for a lifetime. Crying may last for a night, but joy comes in the morning.* NCV™

The reference to God's anger speaks of his discipline and punishment.

. . . Due to his compassion, God limits his people's punishment

NEH 9:28 [LEVITES, PRAYING TO GOD AND MAKING REFERENCE TO THEIR FOREFATHERS:] But after they had gained relief, they returned to doing evil before you. Therefore *you abandoned them to the control of their enemies, who continued to oppress them. But when they came back and cried out to you, you listened from heaven and delivered them in your compassion on many occasions.* ISV

LAM 3:31–32 [JEREMIAH, REFLECTING ON THE PLIGHT OF HIS PEOPLE:] For *the Lord will not reject us forever. ³²Though he causes us grief, he then has compassion on us* according to the abundance of his loyal kindness. NET

God's discipline and testing can be intense, but God brings his people through

Ps 66:10–12 [A PSALMIST, TO GOD:] *You have put us to the test, God; as silver is purified by fire so you have tested us. ¹¹You let us fall into a trap and placed heavy burdens on our backs. ¹²You let our enemies trample over us; we went through fire and flood, but now you have brought us to a place of safety.* GNT

Explain how God's discipline is connected with one of the following characteristics of God: love, righteousness and faithfulness.

Of what relevance is the teaching that God's discipline/testing is temporary and that he brings his people through it, to people with chronic suffering? How is it applicable to them?

What is one point or verse in this or the previous section that you would find encouraging during times of discipline or testing?

Pray for persecuted Christians

II. Spiritual Attributes

The spiritual attributes that God bestows on his people far exceed anything that this world can offer. Attributes or blessings such as love, hope, joy, peace and wisdom are longed for by most people, and sought after in many ways. But it is only from God that they can be gained in their highest form.

a) Love, Faith and Hope

See also:

- *The Holy Spirit gives God's people love and faith*, Ch. 17

Love, faith and hope form a key triad of spiritual graces or attributes. They are linked a number of times in the NT, most famously in 1 Corinthians 13:13 – “And now these three remain: faith, hope, and love. But the greatest of these is love.”

God gives his people love . . .

EPH 6:23 [PAUL, TO BELIEVERS:] Peace to the brothers and sisters, and *love with faith, from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.* NET

. . . God enables his people to love

1THES 4:9 [PAUL, TO BELIEVERS:] Now on the topic of brotherly love you have no need for anyone to write you, for *you yourselves are taught by God to love one another.* NET

God gives his people faith

ROM 12:3B [PAUL, TO THE BELIEVERS IN ROME:] *God has distributed to each of you a measure of faith.* NET

God gives his people hope – especially by what he has done through Jesus Christ

2THES 2:16A [PAUL, TO BELIEVERS:] *God our Father loved us and by his kindness gave us everlasting encouragement and good hope.* GW

1PET 1:3–4 [PETER, TO BELIEVERS:] Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus, the Messiah! Because of his great mercy *he has given us a new birth to an ever-living hope through the resurrection of Jesus, the Messiah, from the dead* ⁴and to an inheritance kept in heaven for you that can't be destroyed, corrupted, or changed. ISV

Through Jesus Christ's resurrection, God has brought believers into an “ever-living hope” (v. 3). This encompasses the hope of their own resurrection and an everlasting inheritance in heaven (v. 4).

God's promises give his people hope

HEB 6:17–18 *To those who were to receive what he promised, God wanted to make it very clear that he would never change his purpose; so he added his vow to the promise. ¹⁸There are these two things, then, that cannot change and about which God cannot lie. So we who have found safety with him are greatly encouraged to hold firmly to the hope placed before us.* GNT

This indicates that “the hope placed before us” (v. 18) by God is based on, or comes from, his promise that is referred to and his confirmation of it with an oath – the “two things... that cannot change” (v. 18).

God's promises to his people include promises for the present life . . .

ACTS 2:38–39 Peter said to them, “Repent, and each one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. ³⁹For the promise is for you and your children, and for all who are far away, as many as the Lord our God will call to himself.” NET

Ps 119:76, 116A [A PSALMIST, TO GOD:] *May your loyal love console me, as you promised your servant. ... ¹¹⁶Sustain me as you promised, so that I will live.* NET

In these verses “as you promised” refers to promise of deliverance.

. . . and promises for the afterlife – notably the promise of eternal life

2PET 3:13 [PETER, TO BELIEVERS:] *But, according to his promise, we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness truly resides.* NET

TITUS 1:2 [PAUL, SPEAKING OF BELIEVERS:] *Then they will have the hope of eternal life that God promised long ago. And God never tells a lie!* CEV

Choose one of love, faith or hope - and say what is unique about the believer's experience of it.

How or in what way/s does God teach believers to love one another (cf. 1Thes 4:9)?

What reason/s do we have to believe God's promises?

Pray for persecuted Christians

b) Peace

See also:

- *The Holy Spirit gives God's people joy and peace*, Ch. 17

OT references to the peace that God gives to his people encompass both inner peace (including being at ease) and outer peace (the absence of war and adversity). In addition to peace with God, the NT speaks of God giving his people an inner, spiritual peace – even amidst adversity. The NT also speaks of God engendering peace or harmony amongst groups of believers.

God gives his people peace

Ps 29:11 The LORD gives strength to his people; *the LORD blesses his people with peace.* NCV™

Col 1:2 [PAUL:] To the holy and faithful brothers and sisters in Christ that live in Colosse: Grace and *peace to you from God our Father.*

NCV™

God provides his people with rest

Ex 33:14 And *the LORD said, "My presence will go with you, and I will give you rest."* NET

Jesus Christ gives God's people peace . . .

JOHN 14:27 [JESUS, TO HIS DISCIPLES:] *Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you; I do not give it to you as the world does. Do not let your hearts be distressed or lacking in courage.* NET

JOHN 16:33 [JESUS, TO HIS DISCIPLES:] I have told you these things so that *in me you may have peace.* In the world you have trouble and suffering, but take courage – I have conquered the world. NET

Because Jesus Christ has overcome the world, in him believers have peace amidst the trouble that the world causes them.

. . . and Jesus Christ gives his people rest

MATT 11:28–30 [JESUS:] Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and *I will give you rest.* ²⁹Take my yoke on you and learn from me, because I am gentle and humble in heart, and *you will find*

rest for your souls. ³⁰*For my yoke is easy to bear, and my load is not hard to carry.* NET

Here "rest" appears to encompass (or at least be applicable to) rest from: trying to obey the OT law in order to be righteous before God, particularly with how it was embellished by the Jews; the burden of sin; and any troubles in our lives that weary and burden us.

God's people have great peace

ISA 26:3 *The LORD gives perfect peace to those whose faith is firm.* CEV

PHIL 4:6-7 [PAUL, TO BELIEVERS:] Do not be anxious about anything. Instead, in every situation, through prayer and petition with thanksgiving, tell your requests to God. ⁷*And the peace of God that surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.* NET

2THES 3:16 [PAUL, TO BELIEVERS:] Now may the Lord of peace himself give you peace at all times and in every way. The Lord be with you all. NET

Note that this is primarily speaking of peace amongst believers.

God's people have peace and rest even in death

ISA 57:2 *Those who live good lives find peace and rest in death.* GNT

Note: God is the God of peace

ROM 15:33 [PAUL, TO BELIEVERS:] Now may *the God of peace* be with all of you. Amen. NET

What does Jesus mean by saying: "I do not give it [peace] to you as the world does" (John 14:27)?

In reference to Philippians 4:6–7 (in *It is a great peace*), how does what Paul says to do in v. 6 lead to the peace spoken of in v. 7?

Choose one verse or passage in this section that encourages you, and say why.

Pray for persecuted Christians

c) Joy

See also:

- *The Holy Spirit gives God's people joy and peace*, Ch. 17

God gives joy to his people

Ps 97:11 Light is sown for the righteous, and *joy for the upright in heart.* ESV

God and Jesus Christ give their people fullness of joy

ROM 15:13 [PAUL, TO BELIEVERS:] Now *may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you believe in him, so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.* NET

JOHN 15:10–11 [JESUS, TO HIS DISCIPLES:] If you obey my commandments, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father's commandments and remain in his love. *"I have told you these things so that my joy may be in you, and your joy may be complete.* NET

The joy is present even in trouble

Ps 94:19 [A PSALMIST, TO GOD:] *When my anxious inner thoughts become overwhelming, your comfort makes me glad.* ISV

2COR 8:2 *They [churches in Macedonia] have been severely tested by the troubles they went through; but their joy was so great that they were extremely generous in their giving, even though they are very poor.* GNT

Promises of God replacing sorrow with joy

ISA 35:10 And the ransomed of the LORD shall return and come to Zion with singing; *everlasting joy shall be upon their heads; they shall obtain gladness and joy, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.* ESV

JER 31:11–13 For the LORD will rescue the descendants of Jacob. He will secure their release from those who had overpowered them. *¹²They will come and shout for joy on Mount Zion. They will be radiant with joy over the good things the LORD provides, the grain, the fresh wine, the olive oil, the young sheep and calves he has given*

to them. They will be like a well-watered garden and will not grow faint or weary any more. ¹³The LORD says, “At that time young women will dance and be glad. Young men and old men will rejoice. I will turn their grief into gladness. I will give them comfort and joy in place of their sorrow.” NET

Note: God’s joy strengthens people

NEH 8:10 He [Nehemiah] said to them, “Go and eat delicacies and drink sweet drinks and send portions to those for whom nothing is prepared. For this day is holy to our Lord. Do not grieve, for *the joy of the LORD is your strength.*” NET

The grief of the people would be offset through them drawing strength from the joy they had in the LORD, or the “joy that the LORD gives” (GNT, cf. CEV).

How can believers have joy even in the midst of trouble?

Explain the connection between joy and strength.

To what degree do you experience the joy which comes from God?
What should one do to know more of this joy?

Pray for persecuted Christians

d) Wisdom and Knowledge

See also:

- *Having the Holy Spirit is linked with having wisdom and knowledge*, Ch. 17
- *c) God Teaches His People*, p. 8

Note that in the Bible “knowledge” generally refers to spiritual knowledge, indicative of a clear comprehension of things of God. This is particularly so in the NT.

God gives his people wisdom

JAMES 1:5 *But if anyone is deficient in wisdom, he should ask God, who gives to all generously and without reprimand, and it will be given to him.* NET

JAMES 3:17 *But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, accommodating, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial, and not hypocritical.* NET

God gives his people knowledge

ECCL 2:26 *God gives wisdom, knowledge, and joy to anyone who pleases him.* GW

MATT 13:11 He [Jesus] answered them, “*You have been given knowledge about the secrets of the kingdom of heaven, but it hasn’t been given to them.*” ISV

Jesus revealed God’s hidden teachings of the kingdom of heaven to his disciples but not to others in the crowds. Presumably this was in part at least because the others were not open to believing and/or were not prepared to intently seek the truth.

God’s people are given spiritual sight . . .

EPH 1:17–19 [PAUL, TO BELIEVERS:] I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you spiritual wisdom and revelation in your growing knowledge of him, ¹⁸– since *the eyes of your heart have been enlightened* – so that you may know what is the hope of his calling, what is the wealth of his glorious inheritance in the saints, ¹⁹and what is the incomparable greatness of his power

toward us who believe, as displayed in the exercise of his immense strength. NET

Ps 119:18 [A PSALMIST, TO GOD:] *Open my eyes so I can truly see the marvelous things in your law!* NET

As suggested by the psalmist's request, God opens his people's eyes to spiritual truth.

. . . They have spiritual light instead of spiritual darkness

1PET 2:9 [PETER, TO BELIEVERS:] But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people of his own, so that you may proclaim the virtues of *the one* [God] *who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.* NET

JOHN 8:12 Then Jesus spoke out again, "I am the light of the world. The one who follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life." NET

The light that Jesus gives enables one to recognize and avoid "darkness" or falsehood – including false ideologies and ways of life – and shows the way to spiritual life.

Note: The exceptional wisdom that God gave to Solomon

1KI 4:29–31 *God gave Solomon wisdom and very great discernment; the breadth of his understanding was as infinite as the sand on the seashore. ³⁰Solomon was wiser than all the men of the east and all the sages of Egypt. ³¹He was wiser than any man, including Ethan the Ezrahite or Heman, Calcol, and Darda, the sons of Mahol. He was famous in all the neighboring nations.* NET

Choose one of the characteristics of wisdom listed in James 3:17 (in God gives his people wisdom) and give one reason why it is associated with wisdom.

What wisdom and knowledge does a Christian have that others do not have?

Do Christians themselves need to do anything for God to give them wisdom and knowledge?

Pray for persecuted Christians

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Persecuted Christians

Over 200 million Christians in at least 60 countries are denied basic human rights solely because of their faith. (Source: World Evangelical Alliance) Every year many Christians are killed because of their faith.

Through prayer, encouragement and practical assistance we can assist and fellowship with persecuted Christians in their suffering. You can play a vital part in this through contacting one of the organizations listed below. Most produce regular news/prayer letters.

Barnabas Fund – www.barnabasfund.org

It provides material and spiritual support based on locally identified needs.

Christian Solidarity International – csi-usa.org

CSI works to defend religious liberty and help persecuted Christians.

Christian Solidarity Worldwide – www.csw.org.uk

It advocates for freedom of religion and justice for persecuted believers.

Open Doors – www.opendoors.org; www.opendoors.org.au

It equips believers for persecution and maintaining a witness to the Gospel.

Religious Liberty Commission – www.worldevangelicals.org/commissions/rlc

RLC defends and aids persecuted Christians. See also www.idop.org.

Religious Liberty Prayer Bulletin – rlprayerbulletin.blogspot.com

This site provides weekly prayer bulletins.

The Bible League – bl.org.au/get-involved/bibles-for-the-persecuted

It supplies Bibles to persecuted Christians and provides training.

Voice of the Martyrs – www.persecution.com

VOM helps persecuted Christians spread the gospel. It also gives material aid.

World Watch Monitor – www.worldwatchmonitor.org

It reports the story of Christians under pressure for their faith.

Then the King will answer, 'I tell you the truth, anything you did for even the least of my people here, you also did for me.' Matthew 25:40 NCV

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