

Chapter 8

MATURING IN CHRIST

Let us leave the elementary teachings about Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again the foundation of repentance from acts that lead to death, and of faith in God, instruction about baptisms, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment. And God permitting, we will do so.

—Hebrews 6:1–3

As we mature in Christ we need to understand the difference between the two theological terms *justification* and *sanctification*. When we accepted God’s gracious offer of forgiveness of sins and new life in Christ, we were *justified* in God’s eyes—Christ’s death for our sin paid the debt we owed but could never pay. Our new life in Christ is an ongoing process called *sanctification*.

Justification

The term *justification* in the Bible is essentially a legal term. It means acquitted, or “not guilty.” One who is acquitted in a court of law is deemed no longer guilty of having broken a law. Therefore, the sentence or punishment for this broken law is now cancelled as well. The formerly accused is now free to go. It is as if no accusation had ever been made against him in the first place.

This is what happens when we accept God’s gracious offer of salvation through Jesus. The Heavenly judicial gavel raps, “Not guilty! The defendant is free to go.” And we are set free! At that point God transfers every sin we have ever committed to Jesus. “God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God” (2 Cor. 5:21). And the punishment associated with all our sin is transferred to Jesus as well. We will never have to experience it for ourselves. Jesus bore all that pain for us on the cross.

He was pierced for our transgressions,
 he was crushed for our iniquities;
 the punishment that brought us peace was upon him,
 and by his wounds we are healed.
 We all, like sheep, have gone astray,
 each of us has turned to his own way;
 and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all. (Isa. 53:5–6)

To God, our sin simply doesn't exist anymore. He looks upon us in love, through rose-colored glasses. The rose tint in those glasses is the blood of His precious Son, Jesus. He no longer sees us as sinners, He sees the image of His Son instead. And all is forgiven, all is made right.

The apostle Paul explains it this way.

This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement [*propitiation*, older translations], through faith in his blood. He did this to demonstrate his justice, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished—he did it to demonstrate his justice at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus. (Rom. 3:22–26)

God's judicial one-time act sets us free at the moment of our salvation—free to begin a new life in Christ. This new life is an ongoing process called *sanctification*.

Sanctification

The word *sanctify* means “to set apart,” or “to make holy.” However, unlike justification, which is a onetime acquittal from sin, sanctification is the lifelong process whereby God continually purifies us. He continually sets us apart from the world and our former way of life, that He might make us holy, preparing us to live with Him throughout eternity—“by one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who *are being made holy*” (Heb. 10:14). It is important to note in this passage that the process of being made holy is a *continuing, ongoing* activity. In Jesus' longest recorded prayer, He prayed to God that His followers would be sanctified: “Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth” (John 17:17). Reading and internalizing God's Word, then, is the primary way Jesus said we become sanctified.

It is commonly acknowledged that you are what you eat, from a physical standpoint. Our general physical health is greatly impacted by the quality of our diet. The same thing is true in the spiritual realm, you are what you think. And what we think is a result of what we feed our minds. The sad reality is that the world is virtually full of mental and spiritual junk food, so to speak,

and the lives of many people reflect that diet. The Lord, however, wants to lift us up out of that spiritual junkyard by filling our minds with the truth of His Word. In that way our very lives become redirected as our minds become transformed. “Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, *but be transformed by the renewing of your mind*” (Rom. 12:2).

When Christ lives in us by His Spirit and His Word, He touches and cleanses every aspect of our lives over time, making us holy—*sanctifying* us. It is through His Word that we see who He is—and who we are and what we need to change, with His help, to please Him. But in order for this to happen, we need to give ourselves over to the consistent study of His Word. We must actively cooperate with God’s desire to sanctify us. “I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you” (Ps. 119:11).

The process of sanctification lasts a lifetime. And during this growth process we will continue to sin. We should not be living a *life* of sin, of course, but we will from time to time make mistakes and do things that are wrong—we sin. When we discover our mistakes, we should be quick to confess them to the Lord and ask His forgiveness. The apostle John was talking to Christians when he said, “If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:8–9). If we refuse to repent before God, our souls become poisoned. It is just like cells in our body that refuse to release their toxins into the bloodstream. They become sickly, and eventually they will die. We must constantly let the blood of Jesus purify us from all unrighteousness if we want to be healthy Christians.

In this final chapter I want to share some thoughts with you about your ongoing life in Christ. Some things you should avoid, and other things I believe you should do. I hope you find them helpful.

Diagnosics

The Bible provides some wonderful diagnostics so we can judge how well we are living the Christian life.

The Fruit of the Spirit. “The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control” (Gal. 5:22–23). What Paul calls the fruit of the Spirit is the natural expression of a life in which the Spirit of Christ dwells, as that life obeys His Spirit. You and I cannot produce this good fruit on our own—it is the result of God’s Spirit living in us and of our obedience to Him.

Paul also describes in ugly detail the old works of the flesh. “Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these, of which I forewarn you, just as I have forewarned you, that those who

practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God” (Gal. 5:19–21 NASB). If the works of the flesh characterize someone, rather than the fruit of the Spirit, Paul says that person does not have the Spirit of Christ and therefore does not have eternal life. “Don’t you know that when you offer yourselves to someone to obey him as slaves, you are slaves to the one whom you obey—whether you are slaves to sin, which leads to death, or to obedience, which leads to righteousness?” (Rom. 6:16).

Jesus said we can recognize people by their fruit.

Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves. By their fruit you will recognize them. Do people pick grapes from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? Likewise every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus, by their fruit you will recognize them. (Matt. 7:15–20)

Our relationship with God, then, is *not* demonstrated by how well we understand the Bible and theology, but by the fruit we produce in our daily lives—how well we practice what we know. It is important to understand this. But do not become discouraged over it. We should continually bring our shortcomings to God for forgiveness and ask for His help to obey Him more fully. His Spirit will then purge those old works and bear the good fruit instead. We cannot reform ourselves. If that were possible, Jesus would not have had to come to earth to die for us. Only God’s Spirit working down deep inside truly conforms our lives to the image of His Son Jesus.

The Sermon on the Mount. Another diagnostic is the Sermon on the Mount, part of which is called the Beatitudes, in Matthew 5 through 7. This passage is Jesus’ basic principles for everyday life. We do well to measure ourselves by its standards, asking the Lord to help us understand and comply with it.

A Christian is called to live an examined life. The goal of learning about the Bible and theology is to know God and by that knowledge to improve our behavior toward the Lord and toward other people. And when we fail, we can go to the Lord in repentance. When Peter asked if forgiving his brother seven times was enough, Jesus answered, “I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven.” (Matt. 18:22 NASB). Would God hold Himself to a lower standard than He requires of us?

Avoid Legalism

Legalism is an attempt to earn God’s favor—you might say, to get brownie points. Legalists think they are better than others because they adhere to a standard—which they have set up for themselves—believing that God approves of them for it. Therefore, as you continue your life in Christ, you

should be sure to always keep the day of your salvation in sharp focus. Then, the gospel was clearly operating in your heart in all its fullness. You were acutely aware of your unworthiness in God's eyes and in the same moment deeply aware of His love for you and His willingness to completely erase all your sin and draw you close to Him. This was a demonstration of God's *grace*—His *unmerited favor*—in which He freely forgave your transgressions.

My wife has worked as a teacher in a Jewish school in Los Angeles for several years and has many Jewish friends as a result. One of Leslie's Jewish coworkers once asked her, "What is this *grace* thing all about in Christianity?" When Leslie inquired why she was asking, the coworker said that while on a recent trip to Texas they had seen a number of Christian churches with the word *grace* in their names. So she figured it must be a significant concept in Christianity. Leslie tried to explain the Christian concept of grace, not knowing whether or not it made sense to the coworker.

The introduction of the novel concept of God's grace by the early Christians was highly offensive to first-century Jews. As a result, most Jews violently rejected both Christ and His followers. The apostle Paul explains the flawed thinking that led to their rejection. "What then shall we say? That the Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, have obtained it, a righteousness that is by faith; but Israel, who pursued a law of righteousness, has not attained it. Why not? Because they pursued it not by *faith* but *as if it were by works*" (Rom. 9:30–32). The Jews were convinced that right standing with God came solely from strict adherence to the outward observances required by their law, as if law keeping could make them righteous, Paul says. What they lacked was *faith*.

A righteousness that is by faith is unique to the Christian message—and is its power. It is our faith in Jesus to forgive our sins and make us clean that allows us to receive God's grace. "It is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast" (Eph. 2:8–9).

God's grace is just as offensive to the human spirit today as it was in the first century. Human beings are fundamentally legalists. We feel that we are inherently good and worthy and that we can take care of ourselves. We set up our own standards for what is right, and feel we are capable of accomplishing them all by ourselves. You might say that we are rugged individualists.

To experience God's grace, however, requires us to acknowledge just the opposite. We have to admit that we are completely unworthy—utterly failing to meet *God's* standards of what is good. We are *not* capable of our own salvation. And we have to throw ourselves on the mercy of God, completely relying on Him. This is an affront to our human dignity. Jesus came to redeem us precisely because we couldn't save ourselves.

Because God's grace is an affront to our humanity, even Christians can find it challenging to keep it in sight day by day in their lives. It can be easy to slip back into legalistic thinking. In fact, legalism is one of the greatest

problems we face in living the Christian life, individually and corporately in churches. Here are some ways it appears.

- evaluating others and ourselves with a critical, judgmental spirit by external standards of our own making
- tending to be unforgiving when we or others make mistakes or do not live up to our standards
- setting up tests of fellowship in a church such as using a certain Bible translation or subscribing to a pet doctrine or practice. Those who do not measure up may be silently, but effectively, excluded from the inner circle or considered inferior or even not real Christians.
- competing to see who can do more for the church. Those seen as doing the most are considered the best Christians, and the rest never measure up to these super Christians
- being on edge, everyone trying to say and do the right things, to look good
- replacing the freedom we should experience in Christ by a rigidly applied code
- fearing to slip up in something and of losing favor or standing

Jesus has no tolerance for legalism. Here is what He said about it.

The teachers of the law and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat. So you must obey them and do everything they tell you. But do not do what they do, for they do not practice what they preach. They tie up heavy loads and put them on men's shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to lift a finger to move them... Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You give a tenth of your spices—mint, dill and cummin. But you have neglected the more important matters of the law—justice, mercy and faithfulness. (Matt. 23:2–4, 23)

Jesus said the more important matters of the Law in the Old Testament era were justice, mercy and faithfulness. They are still the more important matters in the Christian era. Christians should never take after the Pharisees, who added their own rules to the Law and thus made heavy loads for others to carry. Jesus came to unburden people. In His life and in His death on the Cross, He satisfied the whole of the Mosaic law, because we would never be capable of it. And the eternal life He grants us is a *gift*, which we could never earn. “Now when a man works, his wages are not credited to him as a gift, but as an obligation. However, to the man who does not work but trusts God who justifies the wicked, his faith is credited as righteousness” (Rom. 4:4–5).

The apostle Paul expressed his anger with some of his converts in Galatia because of legalism. After receiving the gift of eternal life by the Holy Spirit, they were being corrupted by Jewish legalists who insisted they must also obey the Mosaic law. Here is one of Paul's rebukes to them. "I would like to learn just one thing from you: Did you receive the Spirit by observing the law, or by believing what you heard? Are you so foolish? After beginning with the Spirit, are you now trying to attain your goal by human effort?" (Gal. 3:2-3).

That message was written for you and me as well. The Holy Spirit working in our hearts saved us. The only way forward is to continue in the Spirit of Christ. Paul says that to revert to legalism is to turn to a new gospel that is really no gospel at all. Human effort could not save us. And it cannot sanctify us, either. That is why I say that you should always keep the day of your salvation in sharp focus. It will help keep you from taking pride in human works—how good you are, how much you read the Bible, how often you are in church, how many people you pray for, or any other thing you do or don't do. "[God] is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything, because he himself gives all men life and breath and everything else" (Acts 17:25).

Legalism is such an ingrained part of human nature, we must always be on guard for it, because legalism quenches the Spirit of Christ. Watch for it in yourself. And watch for it in your church and in those around you. But be merciful when you encounter it, whether in yourself or others. Do not retaliate with condemnation or rejection. Be understanding and compassionate, because we are all susceptible to it. "Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you" (Eph. 4:32).

The apostle Paul told the Corinthian church, "I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified" (1 Cor. 2:2). The Corinthian Christians were being easily distracted by a variety of teachers and teachings and were straying from their first love—Christ. Paul called them back to the day of their salvation, to the basics. These simple math equations demonstrate the importance of honoring the Spirit of Christ in you and avoiding worthless legalism.

Jesus + anything else = nothing

Jesus + nothing else = everything

No Other Mediators

When Jesus died on the cross, all other mediators between God and mankind were forever abolished. *This doctrine is foundational for every Christian.* Pseudo-Christian cults, however, actually position themselves between their members and God. They exercise great authority over their members. Members must respect and obey the cult authorities or else, they are told, they are in trouble with God. And members must accept the teaching of

cult leaders as truth because the leaders claim to speak for God. The cult acts as a mediator between God and people—people cannot truly relate to God outside of the cult doctrine and authority structure. This kind of teaching, however, is completely contrary to the gospel.

God *did* establish human mediators—but only in His old covenant with Israel, given through Moses at Mount Sinai around 1400 BC. The three most significant aspects of this old covenant are:

1. The pattern for the temple, also known as the sanctuary or house of meeting
2. Designation of Aaron and his male progeny as Israel's exclusively authorized priesthood. One of these priests was always to be the "great" or "high" priest.
3. The Law, much of which governed Israel's sacrificial system of worship, which was to be (a) executed only by their authorized priesthood (b) only at their authorized temple in Jerusalem

This covenant commanded the people to take a variety of specified sacrifices to the temple and present them to the priests. The priests, in turn, offered these sacrifices to God on behalf of the people. These priests were therefore mediators between the people and God, at God's specific command.

Inside the temple were two inner chambers, one called the Holy Place, and the other called the Most Holy Place, or the Holiest of Holies. A partition, referred to as a "veil" or "curtain," separated these two inner chambers. While all priests were allowed to minister in the Holy Place, where most sacrifices were offered, only the high priest was allowed in the Most Holy Place—and that only once a year, on Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement. At that time, the high priest offered sacrifices first for his own sins and then for the whole community of Israel.

The sacrificial system of Israel remained in place for roughly fourteen hundred years and was a gigantic arrow pointing to the perfect work that Jesus would do one day. At the moment of Jesus' death on the cross, having fully completed His Father's will, with His final words, He loudly proclaimed, "It is finished" (John 19:30), the cry of Victory! Immediately, "The curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom" (Matt. 27:51). This curtain was no mere sheet. It was sixty feet high, thirty feet wide and as thick as a man's palm is wide. It certainly could not have been torn in two accidentally. And it is most significant that it was torn in two *from the top down*. Clearly, only the powerful hand of God Most High could have ripped this massive curtain in two.¹

¹ "This veil, which was the thickness of a palm breadth, was sixty feet long and thirty broad, and separated the Holy and Most Holy Places. Various attempts have been

So why did God tear open the curtain that veiled the Most Holy Place? It was a powerful demonstration to say, “You can come in now.” God’s own presence—previously off limits to all but the high priest once a year—was, at Christ’s death, opened for *all* to enter, *all* the time, *forever* (see Heb. 10:10, 12–14). This torn curtain ushered in what is called the *priesthood of all believers*, as the apostle Peter explains. “You are a chosen people, a *royal priesthood*, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light” (1 Peter 2:9). Each Christian now has all the privileges once reserved exclusively for Israel’s high priest. That explains why “every Christian was held to be a priest unto God” in the primitive Christian church of the first century.²

The author of the book of Hebrews sums up nicely this new relationship we have with God.

Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith. (Heb. 10:19–22)

This torn curtain—Jesus’ sacrifice of Himself—forever opened the way into God’s own presence. *And that means there are no other mediators between Christians and their God!* By His death and resurrection, Jesus made completely obsolete Israel’s mediatory priesthood—no further sacrifices are required because His sacrifice was perfect and complete. The result is that He now lives in God’s presence as our sole mediator. “There is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus” (1 Tim. 2:5).

The letter to the Hebrews says,

Because Jesus lives forever, he has a permanent priesthood. Therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through him...Unlike the other high priests, he does not need to offer sacrifices day after day, first for his own sins, and then for the sins of the people. He sacrificed for their sins once for all when he offered himself...

made to explain this strange phenomenon on naturalistic grounds, such as the earthquake, or as Jerome’s comment on the Gospel according to the Hebrews, by the fall of the huge lintel of the Temple broken by the earthquake. But this veil was of such tough fabric and so woven that it could not have been rent in twain by an earthquake or the falling of a lintel. Matthew connects the phenomenon directly with the death of Jesus, calling attention to the fact that it was rent ‘from top to bottom’ by God’s hand, throwing open thus the Most Holy Place to all men.” Shepard, *Christ of the Gospels*, p. 604.

² Latourette, *History*: vol. 1, *Beginnings to 1500*, p.133.

We do have such a high priest, who sat down at the right hand of the throne of Majesty in heaven, and who serves in the sanctuary, the true tabernacle set up by the Lord, not by man.

Every high priest is appointed to offer both gifts and sacrifices, and so it was necessary for this one also to have something to offer. If he were on earth, he would not be a priest, for there are already men who offer the gifts prescribed by the law...But the ministry Jesus has received is as superior to theirs as the covenant of which he is mediator is superior to the old one. (7:24–25, 27; 8:1–4, 6)

The importance of this concept—this reality—that every Christian has direct access to God cannot be overemphasized. Christians get into all kinds of trouble when they let other people or institutions get between them and God. Jesus *alone* paid the price for our sin, He *alone* will come for us at the end of this present age, and it is He *alone* who will rule as both King and Priest in the age to come. And it is before Him *alone* that “every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Phil. 2:10–11). His death and resurrection completely leveled the playing field here on earth. It is often said that the ground is level at the foot of the cross. That means that Christians are all equal before God. And each of us has equal access to the Father through the perfect and fully completed work of His Son. Jesus confirmed this as He talked about authority and equality among His followers.

You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. *Not so with you.* Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave—just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many. (Matt. 20:25–28)

But you are not to be called “Rabbi,” for you have only one Master *and you are all brothers.* And do not call anyone on earth “father,” for you have one Father, and he is in heaven. Nor are you to be called “teacher,” for you have one Teacher, the Christ. The greatest among you will be your servant. For whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted. (Matt. 23:8–12)

This equality of believers has at least two implications. First, you should not put any person or institution on a pedestal. Second, you should not allow anyone to put *you* on a pedestal. The only one deserving a pedestal is Jesus. The apostle Paul commended the church at Berea because they would not put even *him* on a pedestal but insisted on checking out Paul’s message for themselves. “Now the Bereans were of more noble character than the Thessalonians, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true” (Acts 17:11). It is good that we learn from others and perhaps even admire them.

But we all need to be good Bereans and know for ourselves what is right.

Part of the problem with religious mediators is that many people today have authority needs. Some people like to exercise authority, while others like to submit to authority, thus absolving themselves of personal responsibility. Sadly, this is true in the church as well. In the church, some people like the view from the top of a pedestal, while others carry a pedestal around looking for someone to enshrine. Often these folks end up finding each other and participate in unhealthy relationships. But according to Jesus it is not supposed to be that way in the church. So be careful to not get involved with it—from either end of the pedestal.

Intercession

The pain of leaving a pseudo-Christian cult, understandably, keeps us centered inward on ourselves. But as we mature in Christ, we begin more fully to see with His eyes and feel with His heart. In the process, the Lord begins to raise our concern for the welfare of others. Indeed, praying to God for the benefit of others is one of the great privileges and responsibilities of being a Christian.

You will likely want to pray for those you left behind in your old church. The Lord may not use you to talk with them directly, but your prayers will come up to God as a memorial offering on their behalf (Acts 10:4). You may never be aware of it, but others may have been praying for your release from the bondage of your old church. Humbling thought, isn't it? You can return the favor now by praying for those you left behind. Only when we get to heaven will we realize who has prayed for us. And we will thank them. Be patient and persistent in your prayers, because God has His own timetable. We are concerned with weeks and months and years. God is concerned with eternity.

Besides those we left behind, there is a host of people who need our prayers: our families and loved ones, bosses, subordinates, neighbors, governmental leaders and—even our enemies. “Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven” (Matt. 5:44–45).

I urge, then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone—for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness. This is good, and pleases God our Savior, who wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth. (1 Tim. 2:1–4)

Ghosts from Your Past

You hear a familiar sounding quote or perhaps a familiar passage will come to mind. You have a mild panic attack—does it come from the Bible—or from the scriptures of your old church? Even after thinking about it for

awhile you cannot be sure. When you get home you hurriedly look it up to ease your mind. Sometimes you are successful in finding the passage in the Bible, but occasionally you discover it was from your old church. This is an unsettling phenomenon that deserves attention. You left your old church behind, with all of its errors and spurious scriptures. Why is that old stuff coming back to haunt you still?

This scenario is common for former members of pseudo-Christian cults. It is quite understandable if you stop to think about it. The teachings of your old church were once very important to you. They were once your most important guides for living and for understanding God. These teachings had an important place deep down inside you. Should you be surprised that they rear their ugly heads, though you left them behind?

The good news is that these memories don't last forever. The longer you are out and the more of the Bible you place in your mind, the less it happens. Truth is renewing your mind and reinventing you. "Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, *but be transformed by the renewing of your mind*. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will" (Rom. 12:2). You are in the process of being shaped in the likeness of Jesus Christ, by His Spirit and by His Word becoming more and more part of your mind and your life. But this doesn't happen overnight.

So be patient with yourself. Don't doubt your salvation or your spiritual commitment to Christ when those old passages come to mind—and they will. Instead, here are a couple of other ways of dealing with this problem.

The easiest thing may be to just forget about them and not get upset. Choose to put them out of your mind. Limit the amount of damage they can do by just ignoring them and moving on, realizing that such memories will not come back to haunt you forever. Getting upset over them merely magnifies the damage for no useful purpose.

A more aggressive approach is to look up the passage in your old material and study it—in detail—to understand exactly why it is wrong and contrary to the Bible and to genuine Christian doctrine. In-depth study completely destroys the pull of that old material on you. You become its master. And in the process you learn more and more about the truth of the Bible, so these old memories become part of your growing process. And if that old material comes up in conversation with members of your old church, you will be well prepared, knowing exactly what to tell them about why it's wrong.

All Christians, whether or not they have been involved in a pseudo-Christian cult, have sin and circumstances in their lives that they need to leave behind. We need to stop glancing backward at our sin and problems and focus on the present and look forward to the glorious future we have in Christ. "Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 3:13–14). As you fill your mind and life increasingly with

Christ and His Word, the ghosts from your past will have no room to dwell. Press forward into Christ and let Him be your Ghost Buster.

The Long Way Home

It was undoubtedly a painful experience to leave your pseudo-Christian cult. But it was the Lord's purpose through that experience to draw you close to Him—based on the truth instead of lies—and to heal you. The Lord told Israel, “I wound, and I heal” (Deut. 32:39 KJV). The process you are going through is a kind of discipline.

No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.

Therefore, strengthen your feeble arms and weak knees. “Make level paths for your feet,” so that the lame may not be disabled, but rather healed. (Heb. 12:11–13)

The Lord disciplines you because He loves you. If He did not love you, He could have just left you where you were. So count it an honor and a privilege to come under His discipline.

My son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you, because the Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes everyone he accepts as a son. (Heb. 12:5–6)

Because of His discipline you are now on the right path and are running the right race. The prize for that race is a crown that will last forever.

Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize. Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last; but we do it to get a crown that will last forever. (1 Cor. 9:24–25)

So take heart, because

He who began a good work in you
will carry it on to completion
until the day of Christ Jesus.
~ Philippians 1:6 ~