

The Four Spiritual Laws  
An Analysis of Campus Crusade's Method of Evangelism

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### Abstract

The Four Spiritual Laws is a method of evangelism that has sold over one hundred million copies and has been translated into many different languages. This shows that the Four Spiritual Laws has been effective in its presentation of the Gospel. The purpose of this thesis is to analyze the Four Spiritual Laws. This thesis will identify whether the message of the Four Spiritual Laws is biblically accurate. This will be done through an exegetical analysis of the Bible verses that the Four Spiritual Laws cite. Suggestions will be given to improve any weaknesses of the Four Spiritual Laws that are found through this study. Overall, the Gospel presentation in the Four Spiritual Laws is biblically accurate. However, there are some concerns with how the Gospel is presented.

## The Four Spiritual Laws

### An Analysis of Campus Crusade's Method of Evangelism

#### **Background of the Four Spiritual Laws**

The Four Spiritual Laws is a method that Campus Crusade uses for evangelism. This method was first published by Bill Bright, the founder of Campus Crusade, in 1957.<sup>1</sup> The Four Spiritual Laws can be found in a pamphlet titled *Have You Heard of the Four Spiritual Laws?* In the Four Spiritual Laws, Bill Bright tries to simplify the truths of the Gospel in order to reach as many people as possible with the Gospel.<sup>2</sup> The truths of the Gospel are portrayed as spiritual laws in order to help people recognize that just as there are physical laws that the universe is governed by, there are also spiritual laws that govern the relationship between God and man.<sup>3</sup> The difference between the Four Spiritual Laws and many other methods of evangelism is that the *Four Spiritual Laws* starts on a positive note in explaining God's love rather than starting by explaining how mankind is sinful.<sup>4</sup> The Four Spiritual Laws have been very successful. The pamphlet in which the Four Spiritual Laws is published has sold "over one hundred million copies" and has been translated into "all of the major languages in the world."<sup>5</sup>

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1. "Died. William 'Bill' R. Bright," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 27.4 (October, 2003): 164.

2. Richard Quebedeaux, *I Found It!* (San Francisco, CA: Harper & Row, 1979), 179.

3. *Ibid.*, 93-97.

4. *Ibid.*, 97.

5. "Have You Heard of the Four Spiritual Laws?" Campus Crusade. <http://www.campuscrusade.com/catalog/Have-You-Heard-Of-The-Four-Spiritual-Laws-English.html> (accessed February 6, 2012).

### The First Law

The first law of the Four Spiritual Laws is, “God **loves** you and offers a wonderful **plan** for your life” (emphasis in original).<sup>6</sup> The verses that Bill Bright uses to prove this law are John 3:16 and John 10:10.

#### God Loves Everyone

John 3:16 declares, “For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.”<sup>7</sup> This verse is in the context of Jesus talking to Nicodemus about being born again. There are scholars who take this verse to be the words of the writer of John rather than to be what Jesus was saying to Nicodemus.<sup>8</sup> Regardless, the important part of this verse for this spiritual law is whether God loves everyone. This verse asserts that God loved the “world.” The Jews at the writing of the Gospel of John would think that God loves the people of Israel, but they did not seem to believe that God loved the rest of the world.<sup>9</sup> The Jews believed that God only loved the Jews. Therefore, if this means that God loves everybody, then it would be a new idea for the Jews. There are many different things that the word that is translated “world” can mean. However, in this context, the “world” refers to sinful humanity.<sup>10</sup> Therefore, this is not just referring to one specific group of people, but rather

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6. Bill Bright, *Have You Heard of the Four Spiritual Laws?* (Peachtree City, GA: Campus Crusade, 2007), 2.

7. All Bible references, unless otherwise noted, are from the New American Standard Bible 1995 edition.

8. D.A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1991), 203.

9. Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995), 203.

10. Andreas J. Köstenberger, *John*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2004), 129.

everyone. This is because everyone has sinned (Romans 3:23). Everyone falls under the category of sinful humanity. This is the group that God loves. God does not love them because they deserve to be loved. Instead, God's love comes from His nature.<sup>11</sup> The Bible affirms, "God is love" (1 John 4:8). It is in God's nature to be loving towards people. However, this love that God has does not get in the way of His other attributes. God can be a loving God and still judge the people of the world for their sins. People may misunderstand God's love and think that since God is love, He will not judge them for their sins. However, this could not be further from the truth because God is, also, just (Deuteronomy 32:4). All in all, God does love everybody, so the first law is accurate in explaining that God loves the person that is reading the Four Spiritual Laws.

### **God Has a Wonderful Plan for Everyone**

John 10:10b declares, "I came that they may have life, and have *it* abundantly" (italicized in original). This verse is in the context of Jesus giving the parable of the Good Shepherd. The immediate context for this verse is that Jesus is describing Himself as the door (John 10:7, 9). The reference to Jesus being the door seems to refer to Jesus being the only way to receive salvation.<sup>12</sup> Jesus continues by contrasting Himself with the thief who "comes only to steal and kill and destroy" (John 10:10a). Jesus is the opposite of the thief because He brings life. The life that Jesus brings should not just be thought of as a life to come in the future. Instead, this is a full life in the present.<sup>13</sup> This life should be thought of as "life at its scarcely imagined best, life to be lived."<sup>14</sup> However, this life

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11. Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, 203.

12. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 385.

13. Köstenberger, *John*, 304.

14. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 385.

should not be defined by what humans think of as the best life possible. Instead, it should be viewed as what is truly life to the fullest. This verse does not teach that God has a specific plan for everyone's life as the spiritual law makes it seem. Instead, it teaches that God desires to give humans the best life that humans could ever live. Therefore, if the plan in the spiritual law is viewed as a general plan to allow humans to have the best life that they could possibly have, then this spiritual law would be accurate. However, it appears to be deceptive because it makes it seem as if God has a specific plan for everyone. This is not what John 10:10 is proposing.

### **Solution to First Spiritual Law**

This spiritual law is perfectly accurate in declaring that God loves the person who is reading the Four Spiritual Laws. However, the first law runs into a problem when it mentions that God offers a wonderful plan for the reader's life. God may have a wonderful plan for everybody's life, but this verse is not referring to a specific plan. Instead, God offers the reader to experience life the way that it was meant to be lived. Therefore, it seems like the verbage needs to be changed on this part of the spiritual law. This part of the first law could be changed to "God offers you the best way to live life." The term "way" seems to be a more accurate way to describe the subject of John 10:10. Jesus came to give everyone the ability to live life the way that life is supposed to be lived. The new version of the first law would be, "God **loves** you and **offers** you the best way to live life" (emphasis added).

### **The Second Law**

The second law of the Four Spiritual Laws is, "Man is **sinful** and **separated** from God. Therefore, he cannot know and experience God's love and plan for his life"

(emphasis in original).<sup>15</sup> The second law of the Four Spiritual Laws is given to show the reason why people are not experiencing the abundant life that Jesus came to bring. The verses that Bill Bright uses to support this law are Romans 3:23 and Romans 6:23.

### **Man is Sinful**

Romans 3:23 declares, “For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” In the context of this verse, Paul is presenting the message of the Gospel to the believers in Rome. Paul has just finished explaining how everyone is rightly condemned before God because they have all sinned and have not lived up to the standard of righteousness (Romans 1:18-3:20). This verse is in the immediate context of Paul explaining how God has justified believers through faith in Jesus Christ. However, Romans 3:23 interrupts Paul’s discussion on justification by showing how everyone has sinned. After this verse, Paul continues to discuss justification. Therefore, Romans 3:23 is a parenthesis that reminds the reader that everyone is in need of God to save them.<sup>16</sup> No person can ever come before God and think that he or she does not need God to be justified. When Paul wrote this, he was thinking mainly of both Jews and Greeks having sinned, but this also includes every person.<sup>17</sup> There is not a person alive who has not sinned against God. Fitzmyer writes, “The characteristic of all humanity is that it is sinful; all are sinners, rebels against God, and their condition can be remedied only by God himself.”<sup>18</sup>

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15. Bright, *Have You Heard of the Four Spiritual Laws?* 4.

16. James D. G. Dunn, *Romans 1-8*, World Biblical Commentary 38A (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1988), 178.

17. Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *Romans*, The Anchor Bible (New Haven, CT: Yale University, 1993), 346.

18. *Ibid.*, 346.



Therefore, this verse definitely supports the spiritual law in affirming that all mankind is sinful.

### **Fellowship with God Broken by Sin**

In between the two verses is a section explaining what sin is, and how man's fellowship with God was broken. The pamphlet explains that humans were "created to have fellowship with God."<sup>19</sup> If the pamphlet is implying that the purpose of humans is to have fellowship with God, then this might not be completely true. However, it does not seem as if the pamphlet is trying to imply this. Instead, it seems to be saying that God made humans in such a way that they would have fellowship with Him. This can be seen in Genesis when God placed Adam and Eve on the earth. God communicated with Adam and placed him in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 2:15-17). Adam and Eve were able to hear the sound of God walking in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3:8). Adam and Eve had to hide themselves from God's presence by going among the trees of the garden (Genesis 3:8). God called out to Adam (Genesis 3:9). All of this shows that there was a special fellowship that the first humans had with God.

The pamphlet proceeds to explain how that special fellowship was broken. The pamphlet explains that man's "stubborn self-will" caused him to decide to go his "own independent way" which caused the special fellowship between man and God to break.<sup>20</sup> This is evident in the way that man's fellowship with God was broken in the Garden of Eden. Adam and Eve were disobedient by eating fruit from the tree that God told Adam and Eve never to eat (Genesis 3:1-6). Although they knew that God told them not to eat

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19. Bright, *Have You Heard of the Four Spiritual Laws?* 4.

20. *Ibid.*, 4.

from this tree, they still decided to go their own way and break God's command.

Although Eve is described as being deceived by the serpent (1 Timothy 2:14), this does not nullify the fact that Eve decided to go her own way. Also, Adam does not have the excuse of being deceived (1 Timothy 2:14), so it is clear that Adam decided to go his own way.

The important thing to figure out is why Adam and Eve went their own way. The passage does not specifically mention that it was because of their stubborn self-wills. However, it seems as if Adam and Eve were able to make the choice to either eat the fruit from the tree or be obedient to God. Adam and Eve chose to be disobedient to God and to eat fruit from the tree that they were not supposed to eat. This seems to be what the pamphlet is referring to when it claims that man has a "stubborn self-will." The pamphlet asserts, "This self-will, characterized by an attitude of active rebellion or passive indifference, is an evidence of what the Bible calls sin."<sup>21</sup> The pamphlet is not exactly clear when it states that the self-will is an evidence of sin. If the self-will is referring to the sinful nature, then the pamphlet is correct in mentioning that the self-will is characterized by active rebellion and passive indifference.<sup>22</sup> However, if it is referring to the ability of humans to either seek God or go against God's commands, then the self-will is neutral. The pamphlet seems to be referring to the self-will as the same thing as the sinful nature. However, the pamphlet still does not clearly explain in what way this is an evidence of sin. It is an evidence of sin in that people can tell that they are sinners when

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21. Ibid., 4.

22. The phrase "sinful nature" is used because of how widely the phrase "sinful nature" has been accepted since it was used in the New International Version of the Bible in 1984. The word that is translated many times as "sinful nature" in the NIV is *σάρξ* which literally means "flesh." See the discussion over the use of the phrase "sinful nature" in Douglas J. Moo, *Encountering the Book of Romans: A Theological Survey* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), 127.

they desire to break God's commands. However, the pamphlet is not clear when it mentions that the self-will is evidence of sin. The pamphlet shows that there is a positive and a negative side to sin. The positive side is that a person actively rebels against God. This is shown whenever someone breaks God's commands by performing an action that is against God's commands. Clearly, Adam and Eve disobeyed God's command when they actively broke God's command to refrain from eating from the tree that was in the middle of the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3:1-6). However, there is a negative side to the self-will. The negative side is that a person ignores or does not do the things that God wants that person to do. This is shown whenever someone breaks God's commands by not doing what God wants the person to do. An example of this is in the story of Eli and his sons (1 Samuel 2:12-25). Eli's sons were wicked and were not following God's commands (1 Samuel 2:12-17). Eli rebuked his sons and tried to get them to stop disobeying God's commands (1 Samuel 2:22-25). However, his sons did not listen to Eli (1 Samuel 2:25). In the end, God declares that He was going to judge Eli and his family for the sins that Eli knew about, but did not prevent (1 Samuel 3:12-13). Eli is going to be judged for not doing the things that God wanted him to do. This shows that not following God's commands is a sin just like actively breaking God's commands is a sin. Therefore, if someone has an attitude of either actively rebelling against God's commands or passively breaking God's commands, this shows that this person is a sinner.

### **Man is Separated from God**

Romans 6:23 says, "For the wages of sin is death." The context of this verse is that Paul is telling the believers in Rome that a person can either be a slave to sin or a slave to God. There are no other options. There are results that happen from choosing to

be a slave to God, and there are results that happen from choosing to be a slave to sin. One of the results that a person gets by becoming a slave to sin is death (Romans 6:21). One of the results that a person gets by becoming a slave to God is eternal life (Romans 6:22). Romans 6:23 asserts that “the wages of sin is death.” This is a military analogy of a ration that soldiers get paid.<sup>23</sup> The soldier gets paid a certain ration for serving in the army. This is the same with sin. Those who are slaves to sin receive a payment for sinning. This payment is death. The implication is that everyone who sins receives what they have earned.<sup>24</sup> The death that is discussed in this verse is eternal death which is set in contrast to eternal life.<sup>25</sup> However, this should not be thought of as just the single event when someone dies. Instead, this also includes the effects that happen during life.<sup>26</sup> This is because this death is a spiritual death rather than just a physical death.<sup>27</sup> Spiritual death is a separation from a relationship with God. Therefore, whoever serves sin receives the payment of a separation from God. This is in agreement with the second law of the Four Spiritual Laws which declares that man is separated from God because of his sin.

### **Knowing and Experiencing God’s Love and Plan**

The wording of the second law of the Four Spiritual Laws runs into a problem in that the statement does not support part of what it mentions. The second law does not

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23. Fitzmyer, *Romans*, 452.

24. Leon Morris, *The Epistle to the Romans*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1988), 267.

25. Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1996), 408.

26. Charles E. B. Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, 2 vols, The International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1979), 330.

27. John F. MacArthur, *Romans 1-8*, The MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago, IL: Moody, 1991), 352. Herschel H. Hobbs, *Romans* (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1977), 85.

address or support the line that claims that man “cannot know and experience God’s love and plan for his life.”<sup>28</sup> There are no Bible passages that are used to support this statement. It is not even addressed later in the second law. It even seems as if it might be an unbiblical statement. This statement seems to be implying that people who are not believers do not have the ability to know God’s love or God’s plan for their lives. However, this is not true. People who are not believers are able to know that God loves them and that God has a plan for their lives. People can know intellectually that God loves them and yet not respond by trusting God with their lives. Likewise, people can know intellectually that God has a better plan for their lives and yet not respond by trusting God with their lives. Therefore, the pamphlet appears to be inaccurate in claiming that unbelievers cannot know God’s love or plan for their lives. It is correct that unbelievers cannot experience God’s love and plan for their lives. This is because sin has separated unbelievers from God and from the way that God wants the unbelievers to live.

### **The Gulf**

The pamphlet continues by explaining that there is a gulf between sinful man and God who is Holy. Mankind tries to get across this gulf by many different ways, including living a good life, being a religious person, and following different philosophies. However, every attempt to get across this gulf fails.<sup>29</sup> The pamphlet brings up the important issue of the gulf between God and man. If this is not talked about, then a person will not understand the magnitude of the separation between God and man. However, the pamphlet does not do a very good job in describing the distance between

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28. Bright, *Have You Heard of the Four Spiritual Laws?* 4.

29. *Ibid.*, 5.

God and man. Instead, it assumes that the reader understands what it means to be holy. However, this is not something that can be assumed. The pamphlet should at least mention a little bit about what the phrase God is Holy means. Otherwise, the person reading the pamphlet will not understand how great the gulf is between God and man. The pamphlet does a good job of showing that people try to get across this gulf by many other ways. The pamphlet helps the reader think about the different ways that he or she may have been trying to get to God. The pamphlet does a good job in portraying that mankind can never make it across this gulf by personal effort. This illustration of the Gulf makes a good transition between the second and third law. This illustration anticipates an explanation of the way to get across the gulf.

### **Solution to Second Law**

Although part of the second law of the Four Spiritual Laws is completely accurate, the second law is lacking in some areas. The second law is completely accurate in declaring that mankind is sinful and spiritually separated from mankind. The second law is, also, accurate in stating that man cannot experience God's love or plan because of sin. However, the second law seems to be inaccurate in that it claims that man cannot know God's love or plan for his life. This should be removed from the spiritual law. The part that states that man cannot experience God's love or plan for his life seems to be the truth. Also, the second law is not very precise in declaring that a person's self-will causes him to choose to go away from God's way. The phrase "sinful nature" is more accurate than the phrase "self-will." Finally, the second law does not do a very good job in explaining what the phrase "God is Holy" means. This law should explain some of the attributes about God like His righteousness, justice, and hatred for sin. This will help the

readers of the pamphlet understand the reason why it is important that there is a gulf between mankind and God. If the only thing that the readers of the pamphlet know about God is that God loves them, then they might incorrectly assume that God is going to forgive him without requiring that a punishment be made for sin.

### **The Third Law**

The third law of the Four Spiritual Laws is, “Jesus Christ is God’s **only** provision for man’s sin. Through Him you can know and experience God’s love and plan for your life” (emphasis in original).<sup>30</sup> This law is given in order to show that the only way that the gulf between sinful mankind and God is bridged is through Jesus Christ. The verses that Bill Bright quotes as support for this law are Romans 5:8, 1 Corinthians 15:3-6, and John 14:6.

### **Christ Died in the Place of Sinners**

Romans 5:8 states, “But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.” This verse is in the context of Paul’s writing to the believers in Rome about what has happened since they have been justified. In the immediate context, Paul is talking about how “Christ died for the ungodly” (Romans 5:6). The part of the verse that Bill Bright emphasized for the third spiritual law is “Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8). Bill Bright takes this to mean that Christ died in the place of everyone who is saved. However, this is not the only way that the word “for” can be taken in this verse. The word “for” could mean that Christ died for the benefit of the believer instead of meaning that Christ died in the place of the believer. This could mean that Christ died in order to give believers an example and encourage them to die to sin

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30. Ibid., 6.

and live for righteousness (see 1 Peter 2:21-24). In order to figure out in what sense Christ died for believers, it is important to look at what word is translated as “for” in Romans 5:8 because there are two different Greek words that are translated “for” in English. The word  $\square\pi\acute{\epsilon}\rho$ , which is a “marker of a participant who is benefited by an event or on whose behalf an event takes place,” is used in this verse.<sup>31</sup> The fact that this word is used shows that it could refer to Christ dying on a person’s behalf rather than dying in that person’s place. However, elsewhere there is a verse that shows Jesus dying in the place of people. Jesus reveals that anyone who wants to be first must be a servant “just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many” (Matthew 20:27-28). The word that is used to show that Jesus is a ransom for many is  $\square\nu\tau\acute{\iota}$ , which is “a marker of a participant who is benefited by an event, usually with the implication of some type of exchange or substitution involved.”<sup>32</sup> Matthew 20:27-28 shows that Jesus died in the place for many. This is, also, known as substitutionary atonement. Even though the same word is not used in Romans 5:8, this does not mean that Romans 5:8 does not support substitutionary atonement as well. The previous verse is helpful in trying to figure out what Romans 5:8 is saying. Romans 5:8 contrasts human love with God’s love. Human love is shown by another human dying for a good man (Romans 5:7). In this verse, the human is dying in the place of the good man rather than just dying for the benefit of the good man. If Romans 5:8 is a complete contrast of Romans 5:7, then Jesus is pictured as dying in the place of sinners rather than

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31. Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (New York, NY: United Bible Societies, 1996), 801-02.

32. *Ibid.*, 802.



just dying for the benefit of sinners. Therefore, based on the context, Romans 5:8 teaches that Jesus Christ died in the place of sinners.

### **Christ Died and Rose Again**

In the pamphlet *Have You Heard of the Four Spiritual Laws?* only part of these verses are quoted. This passage declares, “Christ died for our sins . . . He was buried . . . He was raised on the third day, according to the Scriptures . . . He appeared to Peter, then to the twelve. After that He appeared to more than five hundred . . .” (1 Corinthians 15:3–6, NIV). In the context of this passage, Paul is telling the Corinthian believers the Gospel that he preaches. Paul tells them that Jesus died for their sins, was buried, and raised to life (1 Corinthians 15:3-4). The third law uses this verse to prove that Jesus rose from the dead. This is exactly what this passage teaches, so the spiritual law accurately asserts that Jesus rose from the dead.

### **Jesus is the Only Way to God**

John 14:6 says, “Jesus said to him, ‘I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me.’” This verse is in the context of Jesus’ talking to His disciples about how He is going to heaven to prepare a place for the disciples (John 14:2). Jesus asserts that He will come back and receive His disciples so that His disciples can be with Him (John 14:3). Then, Jesus tells His disciples that they know the way that He is going (John 14:4). However, Thomas responds by declaring that they do not know where Jesus is going, so how are they supposed to know the way? (John 14:5). Jesus explains that He is the Way and that there is no other way to get to God (John 14:6). This verse shows that the third law is correct in asserting that Jesus is the only way to God.

**The Bridge**

The pamphlet explains that “God has bridged the gulf that separates us from Him by sending His Son, Jesus Christ, to die on the cross in our place to pay the penalty for our sins.”<sup>33</sup> This shows that God has done everything that is necessary in order to save sinners. The pamphlet wisely mentions that Jesus is God’s Son. Otherwise, the reader of the pamphlet may not understand who Jesus is. However, the pamphlet does not explain how Jesus was able to pay the penalty for the sins of mankind. The pamphlet should explain that Jesus came down to earth and lived a sinless life. This is why He was able to pay the penalty for the sins of mankind. If Jesus had sinned, then He would not have been able to pay the penalty for the sins of mankind. In mentioning this, the pamphlet, again, brings up the idea of substitutionary atonement. As has already been discussed, the pamphlet correctly states that Jesus died in the place of sinners and has paid the penalty for their sins.

**People Know and Experience God’s Love and Plan through Jesus**

The third law of the Four Spiritual Laws runs into a problem in that it does not provide support for part of what it mentions. The third law does not address or support the line that says through Jesus, “you can know and experience God’s love and plan for your life.”<sup>34</sup> The law just mentions this and does not back it up with any Scripture. However, this seems to be biblically accurate. God showed us the love that He has for us by sending Jesus to die for sinners (1 John 4:10). Believers are able to know and rely on God’s love (1 John 4:16). This seems to show that through Jesus a person is able to know

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33. Bright, *Have You Heard of the Four Spiritual Laws?* 7.

34. *Ibid.*, 6.

and experience God's love. Jesus declared, "I came that they may have life, and have *it* abundantly" (italicized original) (John 10:10). Jesus came to show people how to live the way that God wants them to live. People are able to experience this abundant life only through Jesus Christ. Therefore, Christ is the one who helps people know and experience the plan that God has for them. The third law of the Four Spiritual Laws seems to be correct in declaring that through Jesus people can know and experience God's love and plan for their lives.

### **Solution to the Third Law**

Overall, the third law of the Four Spiritual Laws does a good job in explaining how God deals with the sins of mankind. As was already mentioned, the presentation would have been stronger if it had mentioned something about how Jesus came down to earth and lived a perfect life. This would help people understand how Jesus is able to die in the place of sinful humans. However, the other parts of the third law are good.

### **The Fourth Law**

The fourth law of the Four Spiritual Laws is, "We must individually **receive** Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord; then we can know and experience God's love and plan for our lives" (emphasis in original).<sup>35</sup> This law is given to explain that it is not enough to just intellectually know that Jesus died for sins. The verses that are used to support this law are John 1:12, Ephesians 2:8-9, John 3:1-8, and Revelation 3:20.

### **Individually Receive Jesus**

John 1:12 declares, "But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, *even* to those who believe in His name" (italicized in original).

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35. Ibid., 8.

This verse is in the context of John's explaining about Jesus. The previous verse explains how Jesus' own did not receive Him (John 1:11). However, other people did receive Christ. Receiving Christ is not restricted to a few elite people, but rather is open to anyone. The phrase that is translated "as many as" refers to everyone regardless of who or what they are.<sup>36</sup> The phrase that is translated "receive Him" includes the "idea of accepting the Word (either in the OT or in the person of Jesus) as presenting authoritative teaching handed down from God."<sup>37</sup> Therefore, receiving Christ refers to accepting Jesus as the Son of God who spoke from God. The result of receiving Jesus is that a person receives the right to become a child of God (John 1:12). The "right" refers to receiving a "change of status" in that those who receive Christ have the authority to become a child of God.<sup>38</sup> The implication of this is that even though God created everyone, there are people that are not His children. In order to become a child of God, a person needs to receive Jesus. This shows that a person who has received Jesus is adopted into the family of God rather than having a right from birth.<sup>39</sup> The people who receive the right to become children of God are those who believe on Christ's name (John 1:12). The NASB translation of this verse is misleading because it includes the word "even" in the translation. This makes it seem as if the people who believe are just a small group of the people who become children of God. However, this is not how this verse should be taken. The phrase that is translated "to those who believe in His name" should be taken as

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36. John F. McHugh, *John 1-4*, International Critical Commentary (London: T&T Clark, 2009), 44.

37. *Ibid.*, 44.

38. Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, 87.

39. George R. Beasley-Murray, *John*, World Biblical Commentary 36 (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1999), 13.

defining the people that receive the right to become children of God.<sup>40</sup> However, receiving Christ and believing on Jesus' name should not be thought of as two separate things. Instead, these are just two different ways to describe "the same spiritual change wherein (sic) one ceases to rely on one's own merits and achievements and comes to trust in Christ instead."<sup>41</sup> All of this shows that those who receive Christ are those who believe in Christ's name. Therefore, faith is the means by which a person becomes a child of God. The object of faith is in Christ's name (John 1:12). There is nothing magical about the name of Jesus. Instead, the author refers to "those who believe in His name" in order to refer to their putting their faith in the whole person of Jesus rather than just believing the things that Jesus said.<sup>42</sup> The spiritual law uses this verse to support the fact that everyone needs to receive Jesus. Clearly, everyone needs to receive Jesus to become a child of God. However, there is more in this verse that can be used to share the Gospel. This verse, also, shows that the way to receive Jesus is through faith in the person of Jesus Christ. However, Bill Bright uses Ephesians 2:8-9 to show that receiving Jesus is through faith.

### **Receiving Jesus by Faith**

Ephesians 2:8-9 states, "For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, *it is* the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast" (italicized in original). The context of this verse is that Paul is writing to the believers in Ephesus about how God saved them from the sinful life that they used to live. Paul writes

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40. McHugh, *John 1-4*, 46.

41. Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, 88.

42. *Ibid.*, 88.

that it is by grace that they have been saved (Ephesians 2:8). God gave believers grace by sending Jesus Christ to die on the cross for their sins. Through Christ's death on the cross believers are able to be saved. However, it is not just by grace that believers are saved, but it is also "through faith" (Ephesians 2:8). Faith is the means by which a person receives salvation.<sup>43</sup> However, this is not referring to just believing anything. The important thing is the object of the faith. Although it is not specified in this verse, it is implied in this verse and explicitly shown elsewhere in the Bible that Jesus is the object of the faith (John 1:12, Galatians 2:16, Romans 3:22, and Romans 3:26).<sup>44</sup> The fact that salvation is by grace and that salvation is through faith is something that cannot be separated and shows that salvation is not by human merit at all.<sup>45</sup> In case the reader missed this, Paul continues by explicitly stating "and that not of yourselves, *it is* the gift of God" (italicized in original) (Ephesians 2:8). There is debate over what the "it" in Ephesians 2:8 is referring to. Some people think that the "it" in Ephesians 2:8 is declaring that faith is not of oneself, but is a gift of God.<sup>46</sup> This would mean that the source of people's faith does not come from inside of them, but rather from God.<sup>47</sup> Although this meaning is grammatically possible, the "it" in Ephesians 2:8 is better understood as referring to the whole process of salvation.<sup>48</sup> This means that salvation is a gift of God

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43. Peter T. O'Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999), 174.

44. F. F. Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1984), 289.

45. Andrew T. Lincoln, *Ephesians*, World Biblical Commentary 42 (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1990), 111.

46. Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians*, 289.

47. O'Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, 175.

48. Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 112.

and does not originate inside of mankind. There is nothing that anybody can do to earn salvation because it is a gift from God. If somebody could earn salvation by doing anything, then salvation would cease to be a gift. Paul continues by asserting that salvation is not a result from works so that nobody can boast (Ephesians 2:9). The term “works” should be thought of as any kind of human effort to receive salvation.<sup>49</sup> Paul is making it clear that nobody can do anything to earn salvation. No matter how good people are, they can never earn salvation. This is because if people could earn salvation, then they would be able to boast about how they earned salvation. Then, God would not be glorified in salvation. Instead, the people being saved would be glorified because they were able to do something in order to be saved. Also, when people boast in themselves, they are putting their confidence in their own flesh.<sup>50</sup> This is the opposite of biblical salvation. Salvation is a gift that no one can earn. Therefore, no one can boast. Salvation is all of God’s doing. The fourth spiritual law only uses these verses to show that people receive Jesus Christ through faith. Ephesians 2:8-9 does prove that people receive Christ through faith by mentioning that salvation is through faith. However, there are many other important things that Ephesians 2:8-9 describe about salvation that the fourth spiritual law does not mention. The fourth spiritual law should use this verse to show that salvation is by God’s grace, salvation is a gift of God, and salvation cannot be earned no matter how hard anybody tries to earn it. *The Four Spiritual Laws* alludes to the fact that salvation cannot be earned because the only way is through Jesus Christ. However, Ephesians 2:8-9 explicitly mentions that salvation cannot be earned.

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49. Ibid., 112.

50. O’Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, 175.

### **Spiritual New Birth**

John 3:1-8 is in the context of Jesus' talking to Nicodemus about being born again. During this conversation, Jesus tells Nicodemus that a person cannot see the kingdom of God unless that person is born again (John 3:3). Jesus is not referring to a person's just seeing the kingdom of God with his or her own eyes. Instead, Christ is referring to experiencing or participating in the kingdom of God.<sup>51</sup> The kingdom of God seems to be referring to eternal life.<sup>52</sup> Therefore, Jesus is revealing that a person cannot experience eternal life unless that person is born again. Nicodemus does not understand what Jesus is talking about or how people who are set in their own ways can start over again (John 3:4). Jesus clarifies by indicating that a person needs to be born of water and of the Spirit in order to enter into the kingdom of God (John 3:5). Based on the construction in the Greek, being born of water and the Spirit should be thought of as one birth instead of two separate births.<sup>53</sup> There are many different interpretations concerning this birth.<sup>54</sup> However, understanding this birth as spiritual renewal seems to fit best in the context of the conversation between Jesus and Nicodemus.<sup>55</sup> Jesus proceeds to explain that whatever is born of flesh is flesh and whatever is born of the Spirit is spirit (John 3:6). Each produces according to its own kind. Something that is born of flesh is not going to be spirit. Likewise, something that is born of the Spirit is not going to be flesh.

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51. Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John I-XII*, The Anchor Bible (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1966), 130.

52. Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, 190.

53. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 191.

54. See Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 191-196.

55. John F. MacArthur, *John 1-11*, The MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago, IL: Moody, 2006), 105.



“Flesh” should be understood as referring to human nature, and “spirit” should be understood as referring to a new nature.<sup>56</sup> The point is that a human nature cannot produce a spiritual nature. It is only through the birth that is given by the Holy Spirit that someone is able to receive a new nature. Jesus points out that Nicodemus should not be surprised that Jesus told him that he must be born again (John 3:7). The Evangelist uses the strong term that is translated “must” to show the necessity for Nicodemus to be born again.<sup>57</sup> Nicodemus should have already understood this. Logically, Nicodemus needed a spiritual new birth because Nicodemus was only born of flesh. However, Nicodemus did not understand this. Jesus explains what people who are born of the Spirit are like by using the analogy of the wind’s blowing wherever it wants and people’s hearing the wind’s sound but not knowing where it is coming from or where it is going (John 3:8). The wind cannot be controlled by mankind in that mankind cannot control where it blows or in what direction it blows. This analogy is used to show that the Holy Spirit is not controlled or understood by mankind.<sup>58</sup> The fourth of the Four Spiritual Laws uses this passage to prove that when someone receives Christ, that person experiences a new birth.<sup>59</sup> Receiving Christ is the same as being spiritually reborn. Therefore, it is correct for the spiritual law to mention that a person experiences a new birth when that person receives Christ.

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56. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 196-197.

57. MacArthur, *John 1-11*, 106.

58. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 197.

59. Bright, *Have You Heard of the Four Spiritual Laws?* 8.

**Personal Invitation to Salvation**

Revelation 3:20 declares, “Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and will dine with him, and he with Me.” This verse is in the context of Jesus’s speaking in a letter to the church in Laodicea. The church in Laodicea is characterized as being lukewarm rather than being either hot or cold (Revelation 3:15-16). The people of the church thought that they were not in need, but Jesus told them that they were in need (Revelation 3:17-18). Jesus told the church to repent and be zealous (Revelation 3:19). In the beginning of the verse, Jesus declares, “Behold, I stand at the door and knock” (Revelation 3:20). This refers to Jesus trying to renew a relationship with the church at Laodicea.<sup>60</sup> Jesus is not inside with the members of the church of Laodicea, but instead is outside. He wants to come inside and is trying to get the attention of the members of the church by knocking. The fact that Jesus is at the door and is knocking shows that Jesus is able to mend the relationship with the members of the church.<sup>61</sup> The church is not being removed yet. However, there is something that the members of the church must do. Jesus continues by declaring, “If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and will dine with him, and he with Me” (Revelation 3:20). Jesus’ coming in to the members of the church is conditional. However, the way that these conditions are constructed shows that the members of the church may meet the conditions.<sup>62</sup> The members need to hear Christ’s voice. However, it

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60. G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, The New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999), 308.

61. Robert W. Wall, *Revelation*, New International Biblical Commentary (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1991), 87.

62. David E. Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, World Biblical Commentary 52A (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1997), 260-261.

is not enough just to hear Christ's voice. These people need to open up the door. Jesus promises that if the members of the church hear His voice and open the door, He will come in to those members. Not only will Jesus come in to the members of the church, but He will, also, dine with these members. The image of dining is used because in Near Eastern culture sharing a meal showed fellowship.<sup>63</sup> The members of the church and Jesus will have fellowship with each other.

Revelation 3:20 seems to be used by the spiritual law out of context. The spiritual law uses this verse to prove that Christ is knocking on the door of unbelievers and that the unbelievers need to personally open the door. However, this verse is not written to unbelievers to accept Jesus into their heart. Instead, Christ is addressing the members of His church who have deceived themselves.<sup>64</sup> Jesus is knocking on the door asking to have fellowship renewed. Therefore, this verse does not seem to be talking about unbelievers receiving Christ through personal invitation. Truly, God desires every person to be saved (1 Timothy 2:4 and 2 Peter 3:9). God has given the Gospel through His Word in order to invite people to salvation. Therefore, the Bible can be considered to be a personal invitation from God for salvation. Likewise, the *Four Spiritual Laws* uses the Bible to share the Gospel and could be considered a personal invitation from God for salvation.

### **Receive Jesus through Prayer**

The pamphlet continues by claiming that the reader can receive Christ by faith through prayer.<sup>65</sup> More precisely, Christ can be received by faith alone, but the pamphlet

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63. Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2008), 213.

64. Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation Revised*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1977), 113.

65. Bright, *Have You Heard of the Four Spiritual Laws?* 10.

is misleading when it mentions that Christ can be received through prayer. The pamphlet implies that prayer is the way that a person receives Christ. However, this does not seem to be biblically accurate. The Bible nowhere mentions that a person gets saved through praying a prayer. There is no story of a salvation experience or of a presentation of the Gospel in the Bible that includes a mention of prayer. Instead, the Scripture is explained to people, and they receive what is written in the Bible (Acts 8:35-38 and Acts 2:37-41). This is in line with what the Bible teaches elsewhere. The Bible states, “So faith *comes* from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ” (italicized in original) (Romans 10:17). The Word of God pierces the hearts of people and produces faith inside of them. It is not through a prayer that someone accepts Christ. Bill Bright agrees that it is not through prayer that someone is saved, but he believes that prayer is a way of expressing faith in Christ in a conscious way.<sup>66</sup> Prayer may be a very good way to help someone express their faith in Christ. However, the way that Bill Bright worded the pamphlet implies that prayer is the way that a person receives Christ. Therefore, the wording should be changed in the pamphlet in order not to confuse someone into thinking that through praying a prayer someone is saved.

### **Receive Christ to Experience God’s Love and Plan**

Again, there is an unsupported statement. This statement seems to be the same statement as the statement in the third law. Both statements mention that Christ is able to help a person know and experience God’s plan and love.<sup>67</sup> However, this statement mentions that it is after receiving Christ that a person is able to “know and experience

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66. Bill Bright, *Witnessing Without Fear* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1993), 130.

67. Bright, *Have You Heard of the Four Spiritual Laws?* 6-8.

God's love and plan for our lives.”<sup>68</sup> This statement is correct just like the statement in the third law is correct. The only difference between the two laws is in the semantics. When someone receives Christ, it is through Christ that this person is experiencing God's love and plan for life.

### **Solution to the Fourth Law**

This law is correct in stating that people individually need to receive Christ, but the law is not clear about how specifically to receive Christ. The verses that the law uses to show how to receive Christ declares that by faith a person is saved. However, elsewhere the pamphlet mentions that through prayer a person is saved. This is not biblically accurate. The pamphlet needs to mention that through hearing the Bible a person receives faith. If the prayer is still going to be included in the pamphlet, then the wording before the prayer needs to be changed. The pamphlet needs to concede, “Although a person receives Christ by faith, it may be helpful to articulate faith in Christ through praying this prayer.” This would make the pamphlet a better presentation of the Gospel. Also, Revelation 3:20 needs to be removed from the list of verses used in the Four Spiritual Laws because it is used out of context. Instead, the Four Spiritual Laws could state, “God is giving a personal invitation for salvation to you through these laws. Respond to Him by faith in order to be saved.”

### **Conclusion**

Overall, the *Four Spiritual Laws* presents a good method of evangelism. This pamphlet is an effective method because it simplifies the truths of the Gospel in an easy to understand presentation. This is evidenced by the many people who have been led to

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68. Ibid., 8.

Christ through the Four Spiritual Laws. This pamphlet is, also, biblically accurate in the presentation of the Gospel. The only major concern with the Four Spiritual Laws is how it mentions that a person receives Christ through prayer. This is troubling because people may assume that they are saved through praying a prayer. However, if the prayer is not combined with faith, then they are not saved. There is a danger that this pamphlet may produce people who believe that they are saved when they really are not. However, this will not be a problem for the people who completely understand the whole pamphlet because the pamphlet clearly says that people are saved through faith in Jesus Christ. As was mentioned previously, the presentation seems to take Revelation 3:20 out of context. Therefore, this verse cannot be used to show that God is giving a personal invitation to unbelievers by knocking on the door. However, God truly is giving a personal invitation through the Four Spiritual Laws. Also, some of the ways that the Four Spiritual Laws words things are confusing and could be misleading. However, none of the concerns change the fact that the Four Spiritual Laws is a biblically accurate method of evangelism.

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