

TABLETALK

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THE HEART OF THE
GOSPEL

What Is the Gospel?

THE NINETEENTH-CENTURY Princeton theologian Charles Hodge said, “The gospel is so simple that small children can understand it, and it is so profound that studies by the wisest theologians will never exhaust its riches.” The gospel is absolutely fundamental to everything we believe, and it is at the very core of who we are as Christians. However, many professing Christians struggle to answer the simple question: What is the gospel? When I teach, I am astounded by how many of my students are unable to provide a biblically accurate explanation of what the gospel is, and, what’s more, what the gospel is not. If we don’t know what the gospel is, we are of all people the most to be pitied. For, if we can’t explain the gospel, then we can’t proclaim the gospel in evangelism so that sinners might be saved, and we in fact may not be saved ourselves.

In our day, there are countless counterfeit gospels, both inside and outside the church. Much of what is on Christian television and on the shelves of Christian bookstores completely obscures the gospel, thereby making it another gospel, which is no gospel at all. Since Satan cannot destroy the gospel, as J.C. Ryle wrote, “he has too often neutralized its usefulness by addition, subtraction, or substitution.” It is vital we understand that just because a preacher talks about Jesus, the cross, and heaven, that does not mean he is preaching the gospel. And just because there is a church building on every corner does not mean the gospel is preached on every corner.

Fundamentally, the gospel is news. It’s good news—the good news about what our triune God has graciously accomplished for His people: The Father’s sending the Son, Jesus Christ, God incarnate, to live perfectly, fulfill the law, and die sacrificially, atoning for our sins, satisfying God’s wrath against us that we might not face an eternal hell, and raising Him from the dead by the power of the Holy Spirit. It is the victorious announcement that God saves sinners. And even though the call of Jesus to “take up your cross and follow me,” “repent and believe,” “deny yourself,” and “keep my commandments” are necessary commands that directly follow the proclamation of the gospel, they are not in themselves the good news of what Jesus has accomplished. The gospel is not a summons to work harder to reach God—it’s the grand message of how God worked all things together for good to reach us. The gospel is good news, not good advice, just as J. Gresham Machen wrote: “What I need first of all is not exhortation, but a gospel, not directions for saving myself but knowledge of how God has saved me. Have you any good news? That is the question that I ask of you.” 

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Our Story

WHEN I RETURN to the first few chapters of Genesis, I'm able not only to review the events of early human history but also to see how humanity hasn't outgrown our earliest aspirations. Perhaps most illustrative of my point is the story of the Tower of Babel in Genesis 11. We read in verse 1 that "the whole earth had one language and the same words." Note the unity preserved from the original pre-fall creation. In the garden of Eden there were no translators; everyone spoke the same language. And even though sin intruded to destroy the harmony of the original creation, at least people could understand each other in the initial years of human expansion. They could speak the same language and communicate with some degree of harmony.

Speaking the same language and having the same values, this humanity built a city: "Come, let us build ourselves a city and a tower with its top in the heavens" (v. 4). From the beginning, the dream of human progress, the dream of the human spirit has been to build a city of such magnificence that it reaches to the pinnacle of heaven itself. It's part of our nature as human beings to build monuments to human accomplishment. We can go through the cities of this world and see magnificent

human achievements. We can view the Eiffel Tower from almost any point in and around Paris. No tourist in New York City fails to look for the Statue of Liberty or the Empire State Building. We can't go to Asia without wanting to walk on the Great Wall of China. When we go to Egypt, to the pyramids, we see monuments of ancient kings. Brick and mortar, steel and glass—we use whatever we can to somehow say that we are important, that we are significant, that we want to be remembered long after we are dead and gone.

Listen to the sentiment expressed in Genesis 11: "Let us make a name for ourselves" (v. 4). Friedrich Nietzsche, the nineteenth-century atheist philosopher, said the most fundamental drive of the human heart is the "will to power," a lust for dominance. This is what drives fallen humanity. It's the legacy of Eden, the living out of the serpent's seduction when he said, "You shall be as gods." Why should God get all the glory? Why should the monuments of this world only be to the praise and honor of the Creator? Can't we share in that? Can't we claim it for ourselves? Can't we supplant Him as the Sovereign One? Let's gather together and build a city. Let's make monuments that even God cannot bring down, monuments that will endure forever: statues, walls, cathedrals, skyscrapers, and more.

I remember sitting transfixed and watching Walter Cronkite and some former astronauts describe the first landing of human beings on the moon. When I heard the words of Neil Armstrong, "That's one small step for a man; one giant leap for mankind," I was as excited as anybody else by this incredible accomplishment, this conquest of a whole new frontier. But there was also something that bothered me when I heard those words. It sounded like the Tower of Babel all over again, a boasting in human achievement rather than bowing in prayer, saying, "This is for Your glory, O God. This is the fulfillment of the scientific enterprise You gave us in Eden to have dominion over the earth."

We've been called to have dominion over the earth to the glory of God, but we want dominion for the glory of man. That's what was going on at Babel—a distortion, an evil twisting of the legitimate task that God had given mankind. There's nothing wrong with building. There's nothing wrong with sowing and reaping. Those are the tasks God gave to us in creation, but they're to be done under the authority of God. They're to be done *coram Deo*, before the face of God, under the authority of God, and unto the glory of God.

But what happened in the cosmic revolt? Man wanted to build a city for himself, to build his own kingdom, to make a name for himself, not for God. And this is not a story of ancient defects of human beings. This is our story. We're the players in this drama. Babel is representative of the whole human enterprise that we are

so busily engaged in. "Let's build a city. Let's make a name for ourselves."

Then we read in chapter 11 of Genesis that "the LORD came down to see the city and the tower, which the children of man had built" (v. 5). God inspected the city of man, and He didn't like what He saw:

The LORD said, "Behold, they are one people, and they have all one language, and this is only the beginning of what they will do. And nothing that they propose to do will now be impossible for them. Come, let us go down and there confuse their language, so that they may not understand one another's speech." So the LORD dispersed them from there over the face of all the earth, and they left off building the

city. Therefore its name was called Babel, because there the LORD confused the language of all the earth. (vv. 6–9a)

The greatest building project mankind ever attempted was resisted by God. And it ended in chaos and confusion.

Every attempt of man to build his own ultimate city and kingdom will end in chaos. Any success we enjoy will be short-lived, for the Lord will bring into judgment every hidden thing, every secret thought (Eccl. 12:14). Nothing built for the glory of man will survive His scrutiny. But what is done for God's glory will endure forever. **T**



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WHAT IS THE

G O S P E L ?



In one sense, the whole Bible is the gospel. Reading it from Genesis to Revelation, we see the vast sweep of God's wonderful message to mankind.

But many people read the whole Bible, and their understandings of the gospel differ widely, remain vague, or are just plain wrong. Some speak of the gospel in terms of God's favor pouring out in financial prosperity. Others describe a political utopia in Christ's name. Still others emphasize following Christ, bringing in His kingdom, or pursuing holiness. Some of these themes are biblical. But none of them is the gospel.

Fortunately, we can turn to passages that tell us, explicitly and clearly, what the gospel is. For example, the Apostle Paul

by
**RAY
ORTLUND**

explains what is "of first importance" within the biblical message:

Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you—unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures. (1 Cor. 15:1–4)

Paul reminds the Corinthian believers of the gospel message and its comprehensive

relevance to them. They received it, they stand in it, they are being saved by it. These sacred and powerful benefits flow into their experience as they hold fast to the gospel word that Paul gave them. The Corinthians do not deserve such blessing, but the gospel announces God's grace in Christ for the undeserving. The Corinthians' only catastrophic failure would be unbelief. With so much to commend about the gospel, no wonder Paul ranks it as "of first importance" in his priorities.

What, then, is the gospel? The gospel is the good news from God, first, that "Christ died for our sins." The Bible says that God created Adam without sin, fit to rule over a good creation (Gen. 1). Then Adam broke from God and brought our whole race down with him into guilt, misery, and eternal ruin (chap. 3).

But God, in His great love for us rebels—now thoroughly unfit for Him—sent a better Adam, who lived the perfect life we've never lived and died the guilty death we don't want to die. "Christ died for our sins" in the sense that, on the cross, He atoned for the crimes we have committed against God our King. Jesus, dying as our substitute, absorbed into Himself all the wrath of God against the real moral guilt of His people. He left no debt unpaid. He Himself said, "It is finished" (John 19:30). And we will forever say, "Worthy is the Lamb who was slain!" (Rev. 5:12).

Second, the gospel says, "He was buried," emphasizing that the sufferings and death of Jesus were utterly real, extreme, and final. The Bible says, "So they went and made the tomb secure by sealing the stone and setting a guard" (Matt. 27:66). After they

killed Him, Jesus' enemies made sure everyone would know Jesus was stone dead. Not only was our Lord's death as final as death can be, it was also humiliating: "And they made his grave with the wicked" (Isa. 53:9). In His astonishing love, Jesus identified with us sinners and sufferers fully, omitting nothing.

Third, the gospel says, "He was raised on the third day." Years ago, I heard S. Lewis Johnson put it this way: the resur-

**JESUS, DYING AS
OUR SUBSTITUTE,
ABSORBED INTO
HIMSELF ALL THE
WRATH OF GOD
AGAINST THE REAL
MORAL GUILT OF
HIS PEOPLE.**

urrection is God's "Amen!" to Christ's "It is finished." Jesus was "raised for our justification" (Rom. 4:25). His work on the cross succeeded in atoning for our sins, and obviously so. Moreover, by His resurrection, Christ was "declared to be the Son of God in power"—that is, our triumphant Messiah who will rule forever (Rom. 1:4). The

risen Christ alone can and does say to us, "Fear not, for I am the first and the last, and the living one. I died, and behold I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades" (Rev. 1:17–18). The Living One conquered death and is now preparing a place for us—a new heavens and new earth, where all of His people will live joyously with Him forever.

This is the gospel of God's massive grace toward us sinners. Whatever else might be said only tells us more of the mighty work of Jesus Christ. Let us hold fast to the Word preached to us. If we believe this gospel, we cannot believe in vain. **T**

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WHO IS GOD?

Moses said to the Lord, “Please show me your glory” (Ex. 33:18). In effect, he asked, “Who are you, God?” God responded with these words: “I will make all my goodness pass before you and will proclaim before you my name ‘The LORD.’ And I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy” (v. 19). He promised to reveal Himself.

But no man can see God and live. That is too much for any man—sinful man in particular. God told him to stand on the rock

by
**DAVID
KENYON**

and said, “While my glory passes by I will put you in a cleft of the rock, and I will cover you with my hand until I have passed by. Then I will take away my hand, and you shall see my back, but my face shall not be seen” (vv. 22–23). Moses did well in asking God who He is rather than telling God who he wanted Him to be. Thus, God was going to reveal Himself in part to Moses. He was going to pass by, protect him with His own hand, and proclaim His own name. This meant far more than simply pronouncing the name *Yahweh*—“LORD” in our English

translations—in Moses’ hearing. He was going to proclaim His nature:

And the LORD passed before him and proclaimed, “The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children’s children, to the third and the fourth generation.” (34:6–7)

**JUSTICE MUST BE
DONE BECAUSE OF
WHO GOD IS. OUR
GOD MUST BE TRUE
TO WHO HE IS.**

“The LORD, the LORD”—here God revealed Himself to Moses by His personal name, *Yahweh*. He is the great I Am. He is the self-existent, changeless God through whom all things exist, and He is merciful, gracious, long-suffering, full of goodness and truth.

Forgiveness is so important that it is expressed with a threefold object: “forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin.” He abounds in forgiveness and mercy. But our God, according to His self-revelation, is also just. Our text states that He will not simply clear the guilty. It would be contrary to His nature to simply overlook sin. Justice must be done because of who God is. Our God must be true to who He is. But how can He be both merciful and just at the same time? How can He act in a way consistent with these two traits? If He shows only mercy, justice is set aside. If only justice is served, there is no mercy.

The answer is the incarnation and the cross. The Father, because He is both merciful and just, sent the Son to represent all whom the Father had given Him (John 17:18–23; Eph. 5:25–32). Without ceasing

to be God, the Son took to Himself a human nature, and having been conceived of the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary, He lived perfectly under the law of God, keeping the law that Adam broke. He willingly went to the cross, having taken His elect to be united to Him as their federal head and taking their sin upon Himself. He then bore the wrath of the Father,

paying the debt that we cannot pay.

Paul says in 2 Corinthians 5:21, “For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.” By making us one with Jesus, the Father could have His

wrath fall upon the Son. Justice was done, and our guilt was removed. At the cross of Jesus, we find both the amazing mercy and the perfect justice of God on full display.

Let’s go back to Moses. He knew that no man could see God and live, but God said that while His glory passed by, He would put Moses in a cleft of the rock and cover the prophet with His hand. David knew this imagery well, saying, “The LORD is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer, my God, my rock, in whom I take refuge, my shield, and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold” (Ps. 18:2). And Paul makes it clear that the Rock of our salvation is Jesus (1 Cor. 10:1–4). Our God does for those who trust Christ what He did for Moses. He hides us in the cleft of the Rock. He hides us in Jesus. In Him, our sins are forgiven. In Him, we are saved from the wrath of God. In Him, we know both justice and mercy. **T**

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 *Tabletalk Magazine*

WHAT IS MAN?



Every evening after work, I sit down to spend a few minutes catching up on the news of the day.

Though it's a restful few minutes for my body and mind, I have to admit that I don't find in those moments much rest for my heart. That's because what I see in the headlines reminds me of a deep-rooted reality: there is something wrong with our world, and even with us as human beings. But what is it?

People have given different answers to that question. Some say the problems are primarily economic, others that they're social, and still others that they're psychological. Certainly, these answers may give some insight into some of the symptoms of our travail, but the Bible teaches that

by
**GREG
GILBERT**

the disease is something far deeper and more profound. In a word, the problem is sin—rebellion against the God who created us.

The book of Genesis recounts how God created the world by the power of His mere command, and according to Genesis 1:26–28, the crowning act of God's work was the creation of human beings. Unique among all the creatures in the universe, human beings are made “in his own image.” To be created in the image of God means many things. We human beings reflect God's character and nature in our rationality, our creativity, and even our ability to relate to God and to one another. But the image of God refers not merely to what we are; it also refers to what God created us to do.

Besides living in fellowship with God, Adam and Eve were given the job of ruling over and caring for His creation as His vice-regents. Thus, God told them that they were to “subdue” the earth and “have dominion” over it—not by abusing and tyrannizing it, but by “working it and keeping it” (Gen. 2:15). In doing so, they would communicate to all creation the love and power and goodness of the Creator. Perhaps most fundamentally, this is what it means to be God's image in the world: just as an ancient Near Eastern king might set an “image” of himself on a mountain as a reminder to his people of who sat on the throne, so Adam represented God's authority to the world over which he was given dominion.

Adam's authority over creation, however, was not absolute. It was derived from and circumscribed by God Himself. People often wonder why God put the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil in the garden. It's because that tree reminded Adam and Eve that their authority to rule and subdue the earth was not absolute. That's why Adam and Eve's eating of the fruit was such a tragic sin. By eating the fruit, Adam and Eve were trying to do precisely what the serpent falsely told them they could do—they were trying to “be like God” (Gen. 3:5). They were grasping for more power and authority than God had given them, thereby making a play for the high throne.

The consequences of Adam's sin were nothing short of catastrophic. God had promised that if the humans ate from the forbidden tree, they would surely die. What He meant was not just physical death, but also—and more horribly—spiritual death.

This was a just and right punishment. A perfectly holy and righteous God could never tolerate such evil and sin in His presence, and by declaring their independence from God, Adam and Eve cut themselves off from the source of all life and goodness. They deserved the wrath of God for their rebellion against Him, and the wages of their sin was nothing short of eternal death, judgment, and hell.

**ADAM SINNED
AS THE
REPRESENTATIVE
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WHY EACH OF US
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OVER AGAIN ADAM'S
ACT OF REBELLION.**

Even worse, when Adam sinned, he did so as the representative of every human being. So Paul wrote to the Romans, “Many died through one man's trespass” (Rom. 5:15). That is why each of us ratifies over and over again Adam's act of rebellion against God with our own sin. Born in Adam, we, too, long to be free of God's au-

thority and rule, and so we give ourselves to the pursuit of pleasure and joy in created things as ultimate ends. In the process, we declare that God is not worthy of our worship, and thus we prove ourselves worthy of the curse of spiritual death that God pronounced in the beginning.

If the story of the Bible were to end there—with human beings under God's wrath without a possibility of escape—we would live in a hopeless reality. But praise God, the story doesn't end there. Instead of leaving us to die in our sin, God acts to save. Through the incarnation, death, and resurrection of His Son, Jesus, He saves His people from their sin and makes everything right once and for all, finally and forever. **T**

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WHO IS CHRIST?



On December 16, 1739, George Whitefield preached a sermon on Matthew 22:42 at Bruton Parish Church in Williamsburg, Va., in which he asked his audience the very same question that Jesus had asked His hearers seventeen hundred years earlier: “What think ye of Christ?”

The language Whitefield spoke was different from that of his Lord, but the eternal consequences of the answer were the same. Some of the answers of Jesus’ day—He was John the Baptist risen from the dead; He was one of the prophets; He was Elijah (see Mark 8:27–28)—were similar to answers given in Whitefield’s day. Deists

by
**MICHAEL
A. G. HAYKIN**

such as Benjamin Franklin, a good friend of Whitefield’s, considered Jesus a peerless teacher, but they stopped far short of confessing His deity. Others regarded Jesus as divine, but in such a way that His deity is less than the Father’s. Whitefield, true to the testimony of Scripture, was not ashamed to tell people that Jesus Christ is fully God and that “if Jesus Christ be not very God of very God, I would never preach the gospel of Christ again. For it would not be gospel; it would be only a system of moral ethics.”

TRUE GOD OF TRUE GOD

Evidence for the full deity of the Lord Jesus is found throughout the New Testament.

Jesus is explicitly called “our great God and Savior” (Titus 2:13). The fullness of the Godhead dwells in Him (Col. 1:19; 2:9). He bears titles and names given to Yahweh in the Old Testament (compare, for example, Isa. 44:6 and Rev. 1:17). He is set forth as the object of worship (Heb. 1:6) and is addressed in prayer (Acts 7:59–60; 1 Cor. 16:22; 2 Cor. 12:8). He does things only God can do, such as creating the universe (John 1:3; Col. 1:16), forgiving sins (Mark 2:5–10; Col. 3:13), and judging us on the final day (Acts 10:42; 17:31; 2 Cor. 5:10). He possesses divine attributes such as omnipresence (Heb. 1:3; Eph. 4:10), omniscience (Rev. 2:23), omnipotence (Matt. 28:18), and immutability (Heb. 13:8). The full deity of Christ is integral to the gospel. Any other position distorts the New Testament.

CHRIST, FULLY GOD, BECAME MAN FOR OUR SALVATION.

WHO BECAME INCARNATE

The New Testament also bears witness to the other truth about Christ’s identity—His complete humanity. As the Apostle Paul puts it, He is “the *man* Christ Jesus” (1 Tim. 2:5; italics added). He was raised in humble circumstances (Matt. 13:55). He experienced the pangs of hunger (4:2). He knew weariness and thirst (John 4:6–7). He wept genuine tears of sorrow (11:35). Yet while His humanity is like ours in all of these aspects, there is one way in which it is totally unlike ours: it is sinless. As we look at Christ’s life, there is not one incident to which we can point and say, “Look, a sin.” To deny the humanity of Christ is to undermine the gospel (see 1 John 4:1–3; 2 John 7–9).

FOR OUR SALVATION . . . CRUCIFIED

After a life of doing good, healing the sick, and preaching the gospel, Jesus was arrested by Jewish and Roman authorities.

He who is Truth and a flawless lover of God was accused of being a blasphemer. He suffered shamefully at the hands of Jewish guards and Roman soldiers, being scourged and mocked. He was stripped of all of His clothing and put to death with nothing to cover His nakedness (Mark 15:24; John 19:23–24). His death was the most shameful and painful death known to the Romans—crucifixion (John 19:16–18; Heb. 12:2). The Author of life, who had raised the dead, was buried in a tomb. Most horrific of all, however, was the sense of abandonment by God that flooded the soul of Jesus as He died (Matt. 27:46; Mark 15:34), for

in His death He bore and experienced for sinners the hellish wrath they deserve (1 Cor. 15:3; 2 Cor. 5:21; Heb. 9:11–14, 28). His death was nothing less than a vicarious, propitiatory death. To deny this is to deny the gospel.

But death could not keep Jesus in the grave, for neither death nor Satan had any claim on Him (Ps. 16:10; Acts 2:24–31). So, God the Father, by the Holy Spirit, raised Jesus from the dead on the third day (Matt. 28:6–7; Acts 2:32; Rom. 8:11), and He was seen on various occasions by His Apostles and select witnesses (Acts 1:3–8; 1 Cor. 15:4–8). Rejecting the bodily resurrection cuts off our hope of salvation.

This is the gospel that the New Testament teaches, that Whitefield preached, and that we still hold forth: Christ, truly God, became man for our salvation, died for our sins, and was raised from the dead. Believe this and you will be saved. **TL**

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WHAT IS FAITH?



One of the statements I have found myself repeating most frequently over the last fifteen years of ministry is J.I. Packer's insightful comment that half-truths masquerading as whole truths are whole lies. Packer's observation is a beautiful reminder that half-truths are just that: *half*-truths. When they are presented as though there is nothing more to say, the result is that the truth is compromised. To say that Jesus' human nature is 100 percent human is true. But it is only half the story. Jesus also has a divine nature that is 100 percent divine. He is one person with two natures. If we focus only on Jesus' humanity and never say anything about His divinity, we are guilty of

by
**GUY M.
RICHARD**

presenting a half-truth as though it were the whole truth, and we thus commit a whole lie.

My fear is that many of us in the church today may be dangerously close to violating this precept in our preaching of the gospel. There is no question that the call of the gospel is to believe in Jesus Christ, which is why our preaching must regularly call people to faith. But if our preaching stops there without ever calling people to repentance, it is dangerously close to presenting a half-truth as though it were the whole truth. Repentance and faith are inseparable. They are two sides of the same coin. Faith is the positive side of turning to Christ, and repentance is the negative side of turning away from sin. It is impossible

to turn to Christ and to turn to sin, just as it is impossible to travel in two different directions at the same time. By definition, traveling east means not traveling west, and turning to Christ correspondingly means not turning to sin. Faith and repentance necessarily go together.

We can see this inseparable link between faith and repentance in several passages in Scripture. In Acts 2:38, for instance, Peter responds to those who have been "cut to the heart" and who have asked, "Brothers, what shall we do?" by telling them to "repent and be baptized . . . in the name of Jesus for the forgiveness of your sins." He does not tell them to "believe and be baptized," as Paul does in virtually identical circumstances with the Philippian jailer in Acts 16:30–34, but to "repent and be baptized." The reason seems clear, especially when we take Peter and Paul together: faith and repentance are inseparable. It is impossible to repent and not believe, and it is impossible to believe and not repent.

We see this again in Luke 24:47, when Jesus tells His disciples that they are to proclaim a gospel of "repentance and forgiveness of sins," and in Acts 3:19, when one of those disciples heeds His words and actually calls his listeners to "repent . . . that your sins may be blotted out." In both cases, we are again told that the call of the gospel is not simply "believe, and you will be forgiven" but "repent, and you will be forgiven." The reason is that faith and repentance go hand in hand.

Mark makes this connection even more explicit in his account of the life of Christ. In 1:14–15, Mark records Jesus as proclaiming a gospel that overtly calls people to "re-

pent and believe." For Jesus, faith and repentance obviously go together. The gospel calls us to both.

This is not to deny the doctrine of justification by faith alone. Jesus is not adding anything to faith but, rather, defining what faith actually looks like. Justifying faith is not a bare or naked faith, so to speak, but a repentant faith—that is, a faith that is always accompanied by repentance. To be sure, it is possible for genuine faith to be impenitent for a season. The example of David's remaining unrepentant for a time after his sin with Bathsheba demonstrates this (2 Sam. 11–12). But an impenitent spirit cannot last forever. Christians may not be repentant immediately, but they will be repentant eventually. God will see to

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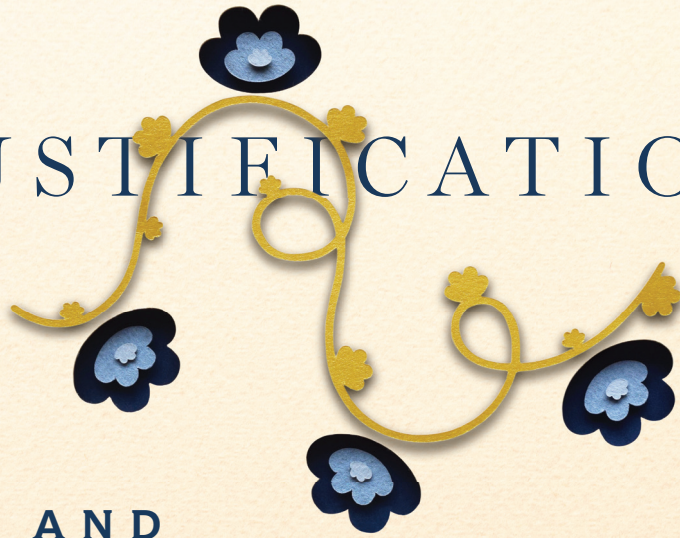
that, just as He did with David, because faith and repentance necessarily go together. Where one is, there the other will be also.

The same gospel that calls us to faith also calls us to repentance. If we focus only on the call to faith, we are focusing only on one side of the coin and ignoring the fact that there is another side. To draw a parallel with one of Jesus' most famous teachings, proclaiming faith but not repentance is like teaching people to "render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's" without ever mentioning that they are also to render "to God the things that are God's" (Matt. 22:21). We are dangerously close to presenting a half-truth as though it were the whole truth and, thus, of committing a whole lie. **TC**

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WHAT ARE

JUSTIFICATION



AND

SANCTIFICATION?

The words *justification* and *sanctification* have largely fallen out of use in Western culture. Sadly, they are also fading from sight in the Christian church. One reason this decline is distressing is that the Bible uses the words *justification* and *sanctification* to express the saving work of Christ for sinners. That is to say, both terms lie at the heart of the biblical gospel. So, what does the Bible teach about justification and sanctification? How do they differ from one another? How do they help us understand better the believer's relationship with Jesus Christ?

Justification is as simple as *A-B-C-D*. Justification is an *act* of God. It does not de-

by
**GUY PRENTISS
WATERS**

scribe the way that God inwardly renews and changes a person. It is, rather, a legal declaration in which God pardons the sinner of all his sins and accepts and accounts the sinner as righteous in His sight. God declares the sinner righteous at the very moment that the sinner puts his trust in Jesus Christ (Rom. 3:21–26; 5:16; 2 Cor. 5:21).

What is the *basis* of this legal verdict? God justifies the sinner solely on the basis of the obedience and death of His Son, our representative, Jesus Christ. Christ's perfect obedience and full satisfaction for sin are the only ground upon which God declares the sinner righteous (Rom. 5:18–19; Gal. 3:13; Eph. 1:7; Phil. 2:8). We are not

justified by our own works; we are justified solely on the basis of Christ's work on our behalf. This righteousness is imputed to the sinner. In other words, in justification, God puts the righteousness of His Son onto the sinner's account. Just as my sins were transferred to, or laid upon, Christ at the cross, so also His righteousness is reckoned to me (2 Cor. 5:21).

By what means is the sinner justified? Sinners are justified through faith alone when they *confess* their trust in Christ. We are not justified because of any good that we have done, are doing, or will do. Faith is the only instrument of justification. Faith adds nothing to what Christ has done for us in justification. Faith merely receives the righteousness of Jesus Christ offered in the gospel (Rom. 4:4–5).

Finally, saving faith must *demonstrate* itself to be the genuine article by producing good works. It is possible to profess saving faith but not possess saving faith (James 2:14–26). What distinguishes true faith from a mere claim to faith is the presence of good works (Gal. 5:6). We are in no way justified by our good works. But no one may consider himself to be a justified person unless he sees in his life the fruit and evidence of justifying faith; that is, good works.

Both justification and sanctification are graces of the gospel; they always accompany one another; and they deal with the sinner's sin. But they differ in some important ways. First, whereas justification addresses the guilt of our sin, sanctification addresses the dominion and corruption of sin in our lives. Justification is God's declaring the sinner righteous; sanctification is God's renewing and transforming our whole per-

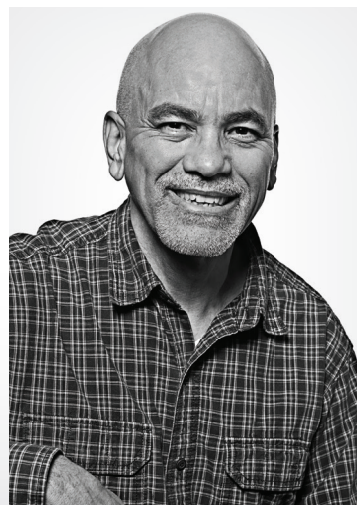
sons—our minds, wills, affections, and behaviors. United to Jesus Christ in His death and resurrection and indwelt by the Spirit of Christ, we are dead to the reign of sin and alive to righteousness (Rom. 6:1–23; 8:1–11). We therefore are obligated to put sin to death and to present our “members to God as instruments for righteousness” (6:13; see 8:13).

Second, our justification is a complete and finished act. Justification means that every believer is completely and finally freed from condemnation and the wrath of God (Rom. 8:1, 33–34; Col. 2:13b–14). Sanctification, however, is an ongoing and progressive work in our lives. Although every believer is brought out once and for all from bondage to sin, we are not immediately made perfect. We will not be completely freed from sin until we receive our resurrection bodies at the last day.

Christ has won both justification and sanctification for His people. Both graces are the concern of faith in Jesus Christ, but in different ways. In justification, our faith results in our being forgiven, accepted, and accounted righteous in God's sight. In sanctification, that same faith actively and eagerly takes up all the commands that Christ has given the believer. We dare not separate or conflate justification and sanctification. We do distinguish them. And, in both graces, we enter into the richness and joy of communion with Christ through faith in Him. ■

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JUSTIFICATION AND SANCTIFICATION ALWAYS ACCOMPANY ONE ANOTHER, AND THEY DEAL WITH THE SINNER'S SIN.



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WHAT IS OUR RESPONSE?



Good works aren't bad. They are good. As Christians, we should want to do them. Just because we are not saved according to our works doesn't mean that we shouldn't be concerned about pursuing a life of joyful obedience to God's Word. Jesus emphatically states, "If you love me, you will keep my commandments" (John 14:15). Obedience, however frail and feeble, is evidence of our love for Christ. Far from undermining the gospel of grace, good works are the perfect complement to the gospel.

SAVED NOT BY GOOD WORKS

To be clear, a person is saved not by works but

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**JOHN W.
TWEEDDALE**

only by God's grace through faith in Christ. The Apostle Paul explains:

For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them. (Eph. 2:8–10)

Works are not meritorious. Salvation is "not your own doing" and "not a result of works." Even the faith through which we receive salvation is a gracious gift from God. As fallen creatures, our best efforts

are laced with sin. To borrow from Francis Schaeffer, how many finite buckets of good works would it take to fill the infinite gulf that exists between God and us because of our sin? Good works provide no basis for boasting because they are utterly worthless to save. The only foundation for salvation is Christ. We are saved by His works, not ours.

SAVED FOR GOOD WORKS

Good works are not bad when they are seen as the goal of salvation, not its ground. While good works aren't meritorious of salvation, they are a necessary component of Christian faith. As James states, "Faith apart from works is dead" (James 2:26). Paul makes this same point when he contends that we are not saved *by* good works but that we are saved *for* good works.

Every word in Ephesians 2:10 is important for explaining the dynamic of good works in the Christian life. We learn that good works are the result, not the cause, of our being new creations, and they testify to the fact that we have been redeemed so that our lives might reflect the craftsmanship and character of God. Good works are also the result of our being united to Christ. Apart from Him, we can do nothing that pleases God. But in Christ, we are created to perform God-honoring acts of obedience. In Christ, we can be confident that God accepts our weak and wobbly efforts. Paul further states that good works are the result of God's pattern for the Christian life. We need not wonder what God requires of us. He has told us in His Word. Good works are deeds done in conformity to God's Word.

A FAITH THAT IS NEVER ALONE

Good works are good because they spring not from a lifeless faith but a "true and lively faith" (WCF 16.2). We are justified by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone; however, the faith that saves is never alone but is accompanied by spiritual life and loving obedience. Christ is the ground of our salvation, faith is the instrument of our salvation, and works are the fruit of our sal-

vation. Whenever the gospel takes root in our lives, it always produces Spirit-wrought fruit (Gal. 5:16–26). The Spirit enables us to walk in a manner worthy of our calling to pursue Christ-like lives (Eph. 4:1–7).

The value of walking the pathway of obedi-

ence is manifold. The Westminster Confession of Faith states that there are at least six benefits of good works. First, good works manifest our gratitude to God for the gift of His Son (Col. 2:6). Second, good works bolster assurance of faith (1 John 2:1–6). Third, good works are a means of encouraging other Christians toward greater acts of Christ-centered love (Heb. 10:24). Fourth, goods works are concrete avenues for adorning the doctrine of God our Savior in life and ministry (Titus 2:7–10). Fifth, good works silence critics who devalue the goodness of biblical Christianity (1 Peter 2:12, 15). Sixth, good works glorify God by displaying His work of love in our lives (John 15:8–11).

What is our response to the gospel? An old hymn puts it nicely: "Trust and obey, for there's no other way, to be happy in Jesus, but to trust and obey." **TC**

**WE NEED NOT
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IN HIS WORD.**

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PREACHING THE G O S P E L



TO YOURSELF

There is great security in the salvation of the Lord. God chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world, and His decision stands forever. The Holy Spirit has caused us to be born again, and there is no means by which we can destroy the life He has given us. Every believer has been crucified with Christ, and nowhere in Scripture do we see a way that we can be uncrucified. Everyone who has believed in Jesus Christ is justified, and no work of man or Satan can overturn the verdict of God. Jesus exercises sovereign care over all His people. Those in His hands cannot be taken from Him. Yet, despite the security of our salvation and standing before God through Jesus Christ, we can still find our

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**JOE
THORN**

way into trouble when we wander away from the hope of the gospel. And wander we do. While wandering can come in the form of giving in to immorality, it more often masquerades as a kind of Christianity. For many, the Christian life is driven by doctrinal precision. We may rightly value our confessional heritage and see the importance of robust theology, but this can itself become the goal for which we strive while missing the connection of all theology to the gospel. Knowledge often “puffs up” and the resulting pride leads us into confessional confidence over gospel confidence. Some Christians base their spiritual life on emotions—the deep stirrings of the heart that are often connected with the profound truths

of God. But while the truths of God never change, our experience of them does. And when the feelings are not there, our faith ends up in crisis. In finding confidence in our emotions, we wander from what should be our only hope in life and in death. Many of us lose sight of the gospel as we focus on our own works and how well we are doing spiritually. By measuring ourselves against self-imposed standards, we believe ourselves to be strong or weak, but in each case the fix is found in doing our best, rather than in the work of Christ.

Fundamentally, the gospel is forgotten when it no longer functions as our ongoing hope and confidence before God, or when it becomes unessential for the practical, daily living of the Christian life. The gospel we often forget must be reclaimed and retained for the safety of our souls, and this is done through preaching the gospel to ourselves.

Preaching the gospel to ourselves is calling ourselves to return to Jesus for forgiveness, cleansing, empowerment, and purpose. It is answering doubts and fears with the promises of God. Do my sins condemn me? Jesus has covered them all in His blood. Do my works fall short? Jesus’ righteousness is counted as mine. Are the world, the devil, and my own flesh conspiring against me? Not even a hair can fall from my head apart from the will of my Father in heaven, and He has promised to care for me and keep me forever. Can I really deny myself, carry my cross, and follow Jesus? Yes, for God is at work in me, willing and working in me for His own pleasure. This is what it looks like to preach to ourselves.

This private and personal preaching can only happen when the Word of God is known and believed; when God’s law reveals our sin and helplessness, and His grace covers that sin and overcomes our weaknesses. Preaching the gospel to ourselves is not simply the act of studying the Bible (though we can preach to ourselves in that act), but it is actively calling ourselves

to believe the promises of God in Jesus His Son.

We preach to ourselves through the disciplines of prayer and meditation on Scripture. In praying, we look to God to graciously meet our needs, and in the act itself we exercise faith. In his exposition of the Lord’s Prayer, Thomas Manton said: “Prayer ... is a preaching to ourselves in God’s hearing.

We speak to God to warm ourselves, not for his information, but for our edification.” The gospel promises in God’s Word guide us in prayer, leading us to the safety of Jesus’ service and sacrifice. By meditation, we call to mind the gospel; by prayer, we claim the gospel as our great hope.

Most of us need to rediscover the gospel. And such a recovery is needed daily because our need is ever present and our hearts are prone to wander. But gospel recovery only happens when we feel the weight of our sins, the weakness of our flesh, and the frailty of our faith. This means that only those who know themselves to be unworthy sinners and who know God’s Word to be true will find the gospel to be not only good news, but good news for their own souls. ■

**PREACHING
THE GOSPEL TO
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AND PURPOSE.**

REV. JOE THORN is founding and lead pastor of Redeemer Fellowship in St. Charles, Ill. He is author of *Note to Self and Experiencing the Trinity*.

THE NEW HEAVENS



AND

NEW EARTH

Right Now Counts Forever. The title of Dr. Sproul's column in every issue of *Tabletalk* concisely captures the relationship between the gospel and the new heavens and new earth. The good news of Christ's sacrificial death and glorious resurrection has eternal ramifications for the destiny of every human being. Your response to that message—whether in humble trust or in defiant unbelief—will be your tipping point between boundless bliss beyond your wildest dreams and unrelenting torment beyond your worst nightmares.

The living God, sovereign over every atom in His universe and every nanosecond of

by
**DENNIS E.
JOHNSON**

its history, is directing the cosmos toward a consummation that will display the majesty of His wisdom, power, justice, and mercy for every creature everywhere to behold. The present heavens and earth, stained by human sin and the curse it incurs, will “wear out” and “be changed” (Heb. 1:11–12), shaken and removed (12:26–27). For the first heaven and earth, no “place” will be found, but in their stead a new heaven and a new earth will appear (Rev. 20:11; 21:1).

The promise is as old as Isaiah's prophecy: “I create new heavens and a new earth, and the former things shall not be remembered or come into mind” (Isa. 65:17–18; see 66:22–23). The Apostle Peter asserts that

righteousness will inhabit the new heavens and new earth for which we hope (2 Peter 3:13). Paul adds that all creation, now subjected to futility and decay, joins God's children in longing for liberation from “its bondage to corruption” at our resurrection (Rom. 8:19–22).

How to describe the new heavens and new earth? To describe the coming cosmos negatively, we can say that miseries that now cause such damage and distress will be gone: no mourning, pain, death—no remnant of curse will remain (Rev. 21:4; 22:3). It is more challenging to portray positively what a world purged of wickedness and woe will be. Prophets and Apostles strain language to its limits to offer glimpses

of glorious realities beyond our experience. We can say that Jesus' resurrection is the firstfruits of the consummated new creation, so His glorious risen body foreshadows the resurrection awaiting His people (1 Cor. 15:20–22; Phil. 3:21). After He rose, He could eat and be touched (Luke 24:39–43), so the materiality of His body leads us to expect that the landscape painted in the book of Revelation—the tree of life's curative leaves and ceaseless fruitfulness, for instance (Rev. 22:1–5)—is not wholly symbolic. At least we can say that our ultimate home is not ethereal and immaterial, but a robust reaffirmation of the Creator's original design, for He pronounced the first heaven and earth “very good” (Gen. 1:31).

God's Word reveals enough about the new heavens and earth to impress on us the urgency of the question, “How can I access that promised homeland of pure pleasure in God's presence?” This question brings us to the gospel. The new heavens and earth

will be populated by God's “servants” (Rev. 22:3–5), who have clung to the Word of God and confessed Jesus (1:2, 9; 20:4). They have been redeemed by the blood of the Lamb, and their names are written in His Book of Life (12:11; 20:12, 15; 21:27).

Yet Revelation's visions underscore the crucial importance of the gospel from another—very sobering—perspective. Those whose names are not in the Lamb's book will be judged by their own actions throughout

JESUS' RESURRECTION IS THE FIRST FRUITS OF THE CONSUMMATED NEW CREATION.

life. Without the cover of the Lamb's atoning blood, they will stand exposed to God's righteous wrath, condemned, and “thrown into the lake of fire,” the second death (20:13–15). Their souls will be reunited with the bodies in which they acted out

their rebellion, and in that fiery lake they will experience not only ceaseless physical anguish but also utter deprivation of mental and spiritual relief. Jesus Himself spoke of this dire, eternal doom awaiting rebels, a place “where their worm does not die and the fire is not quenched” (Mark 9:43–48; see Isa. 66:24).

Does the prospect of unremitting woe—secured by God's unflinching justice—strike fear into your heart? It should. Now is the time to trust in the Lamb and His redeeming blood.

Do the delights to come in the new heavens and new earth whet the longings of your heart? They should. Now is the time to trust in the Lamb and His redeeming blood. Right now really does count forever. ■

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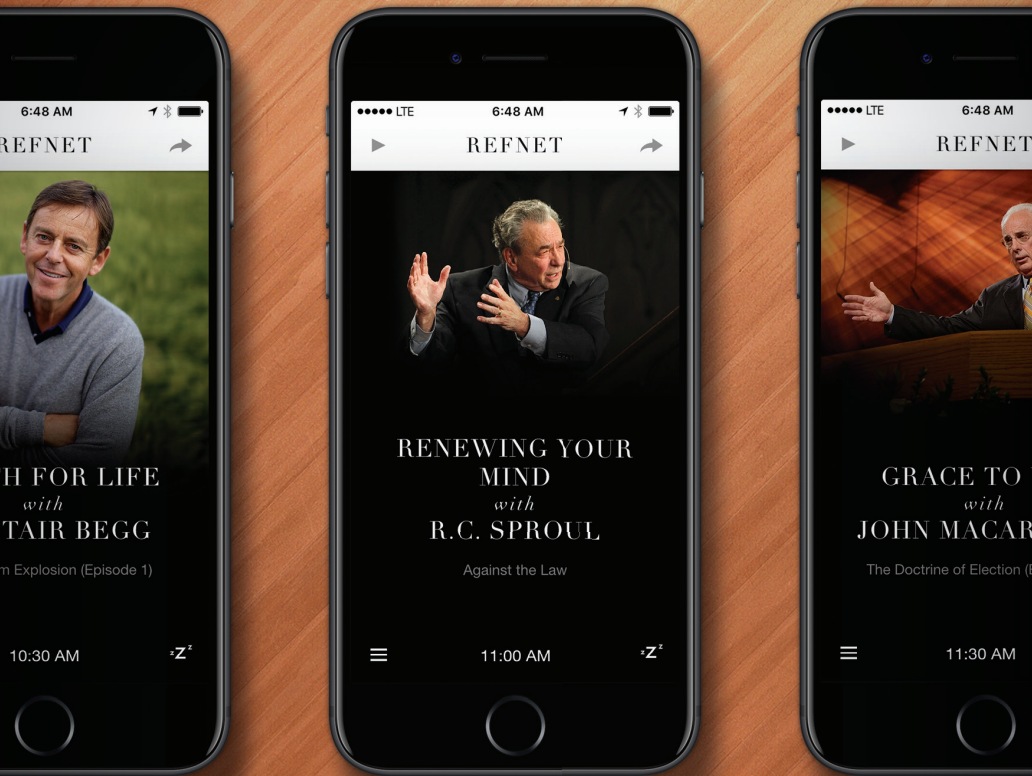
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THIS MONTH'S DAILY BIBLE STUDIES

INTO *the* WORD

LIFE IN THE SPIRIT

PAUL'S EXPOSITION OF the depravity of mankind, justification by faith alone, and the Christian's walk of sanctification in Romans 1–7 builds to a magnificent crescendo in Romans 8, where the Apostle focuses on our life in the Holy Spirit, one of the key benefits of the gospel. In Christ, we are no longer under any condemnation, and we possess the promised Holy Spirit, who lives and works in us for the Lord's glory.

Romans 8:1–30 will occupy our study this month as we continue moving through Paul's epistle to the church at Rome. We will consider the means

by which the Lord frees us from condemnation, the activity of the Spirit, and the way in which God's plan of redemption includes the physical order. Our study will also touch on the order of salvation as we examine the golden chain of redemption presented in Romans 8:29–30.

Scripture has much more to say about the Holy Spirit than what we find in Romans 8. To help us get a fuller grasp on who the third person of the Trinity is and what He does, we will base a week of studies on *The Person and Work of the Holy Spirit*, a teaching series by Dr. R.C. Sproul. **IT**

"I BELIEVE IN THE HOLY GHOST, THE LORD AND GIVER OF LIFE; WHO PROCEEDS FROM THE FATHER AND THE SON; WHO WITH THE FATHER AND SON TOGETHER IS WORSHIPED AND GLORIFIED."

—*The Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed*

ABIDING IN THE WORD

These verses parallel the themes of the studies each week. We encourage you to hide them in your heart so that you may not sin against the Lord:

- 1st Week of the Month **ROMANS 8:1**
- 2nd Week of the Month **1 JOHN 3:1**
- 3rd Week of the Month **1 CORINTHIANS 12:13**
- 4th Week of the Month **ISAIAH 25:8**
- 5th Week of the Month **ROMANS 8:29**



APOSTOLIC ANXIETY

KEVIN DEYOUNG

Second Corinthians 11:28 always seemed like a strange verse to me—until I became a pastor. Here’s Paul, rattling off all the ways he’s been beaten up for Jesus—imprisonments, lashes, rods, stonings, shipwrecks, drifting at sea, sleepless nights, hunger and thirst, cold and exposure, danger from everyone everywhere (vv. 23–27). And then, as the cherry on top, Paul mentions one more trial: “apart from other things, there is the daily pressure on me of my anxiety for all the churches” (v. 28). This is the Paul who faced every imaginable opposition and yet learned to be content (Phil. 4:11) and anxious about nothing (v. 6). And here he is admitting that even with everything else he’s endured, he still feels anxiety for all the churches.

Ever since I became a pastor, I have found unusual comfort in this verse. It’s not that I have accomplished what Paul accomplished or suffered what he suffered, but every earnest minister feels this burden for the church. And Paul had several churches to burden him. The churches were full of infighting and backbiting. They put up with false teaching. They were prone to legalism on one end and complete chaos on the other. Paul loved these churches, and their struggles burdened him more than shipwreck or imprisonment.

I’m not surprised Paul felt daily pressure for the churches. His work never seemed to let up. He had to respond to myriad and often conflicting criticisms. Some people thought he was too harsh. Others said he was too weak. They questioned his credentials. They compared him negatively to the

other Apostles. They didn’t like his preaching style. On some days, they just didn’t like Paul anymore. All this for the man who led them to Christ, loved them like a father, refused their money, and risked his neck for their spiritual good. No wonder there was no weight for Paul like the weight of caring for God’s people.

Ask any pastor who really takes his work seriously and he will tell you of the pressures he feels in ministry—people in crisis, people leaving, people coming, people disappointed by him, people disappointing to him. In the midst of this work, the pastor is trying to find time for study, prayer, preparation, and family. And most pastors feel a burden for all the other things they could be doing: more evangelism, more for the poor, more for missions, more to address global concerns, and more to address social concerns. On top of all this, every pastor has his own personal hurts, his own personal mistakes, and his own spiritual health to attend to. We are all weak.

But be encouraged. God uses weak things to shame the strong (1 Cor. 1:27). His grace is sufficient for you; His power is made perfect in weakness (2 Cor. 12:9). For the sake of Christ, then, be content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when you are weak, then you are strong (v. 10). Paul had pressure. You have pressure, too. But God can handle the pressure. And He looks good when you can’t. **TC**

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NO CONDEMNATION IN CHRIST

ROMANS 8:1–2 “There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death.”

Romans 8:1 marks a significant turning point in Paul’s magisterial epistle to the church at Rome, and this verse gives one of the most marvelous and succinct statements of the gospel in Scripture: “There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.” There is no better news than this. Our greatest need is to come out from under the wrath and condemnation of our Creator, and this need is satisfied in Christ.

This satisfaction is eternal—we will never be under the wrath of God again if we have truly trusted in Jesus alone. We noted this in our study of Romans 5:1 and its description of the permanent peace—the *shalom*—that Christ brings between the Lord and His people. The assurance of Romans 5 is not limited to the point of conversion, but, building on what happens when we move from being outside of Christ to being in Christ (1:18–4:25), it has a particular focus on justification as the entry point into the kingdom. However, Romans 8:1, while not limited to our life in Christ, builds on Paul’s description of the believer’s ongoing struggle against sin in chapters 6–7. Thus, 8:1 focuses on how the reality of our once-for-all justification continues to apply to and have bearing on our lives as Christians. God’s good law reveals our sin and drives us to Christ and to the decisive point of conversion. However, this use of the law—commonly known as the second use of the law—does not cease at conversion. Instead, God’s law continues to expose our sin, the weakness of our flesh, and our desperate need for a savior. It is at these points that we need to hear Romans 8:1 and be reminded that although we continue to fall short and cannot muster the perfect obedience needed to escape the wrath of God, the Lord condemns us no longer if we are in Christ. When we stumble in our sanctification by sinning, Romans 8:1 reminds us that our righteous standing on judgment day is secure, for it does not rest in ourselves but in the perfect righteousness of Christ imputed to us in our justification (2 Cor. 5:21).

Because we have been declared righteous in Christ, the Spirit of God also sets us free from “the law of sin and death” (Rom. 8:2). Before we knew Christ, we could only sow to the flesh and reap eternal destruction. Now that we are in Christ, we sow to the Spirit and reap eternal life (Gal. 6:8–9). By our sanctification and through the Holy Spirit, God prepares us for the eternal life that is guaranteed by our justification and grants us a taste of that eternal life today. **TC**



CORAM DEO

Living before the face of God

As we strive to obey God and walk in the Spirit, we will find ourselves falling short. It is at those points that we must remember that there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. Our sins and failures do not move the Lord to give up on us or to cast us out of the kingdom, for we are secure in Christ. Secure in Christ, we live a life of faith and repentance, continually serving the Lord and putting sin to death.

FOR FURTHER STUDY

Genesis 32:22–32
Daniel 3
Colossians 2:18–19
1 John 5:21

THE BIBLE IN A YEAR

Genesis 3–5
Matthew 2

GOD DOES WHAT THE LAW CANNOT

ROMANS 8:3 “God has done what the law . . . could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh.”



CORAM DEO

Living before the face of God

Paul is insistent that Jesus is the answer to sin because He has done what God's law cannot. It is not the law's fault that it cannot justify sinful people; rather, it is our fault. Outside of Christ, our fallenness takes hold of the law, and we are unable to fulfill it. The good news of the gospel is that God sent His Son to do what we could not do even with the help of the law. Such is the nature of His grace—grace for which our gratitude must never cease.

FOR FURTHER STUDY

Isaiah 53:4–6
2 Corinthians 5:21
Philippians 3:2–11
Hebrews 2:14–18

THE BIBLE IN A YEAR

Genesis 6–7
Matthew 3–4

Even as Paul continues in Romans 8 to unfold the marvelous benefits of the gospel, he never forgets what he has already said, and he seeks to make sure that we do not forget it either. In order to appreciate the consequences of the gospel appropriately, we must remember what God has done for us in Christ Jesus alone. The minute we forget that and try to serve God and enjoy the benefits of the gospel without a proper grounding in the gospel, our Christian lives will experience a downward spiral.

Romans 8:1 reminds us that there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ (see 5:1), and today's passage explains why we are not under condemnation. We are never to think that in forgiving us the Lord simply waves away the just demands of His law and ignores the sentence that His law pronounces upon fallen people. God will never fail to condemn our sin—the only question is where this condemnation will take place. The reason we do not suffer God's condemnation is not because He sets the condemnation aside; rather, it is because the condemnation does not take place in us but in Christ. As the Apostle tells us, our Father “condemned sin in the flesh” of His Son. He did not set aside His law—He upheld it in Christ for our sake (8:2; see Isa. 53; Rom. 3:21–26). Dr. R.C. Sproul writes in his commentary *Romans* that “in [God's] Son, there is no condemnation for His people. There is condemnation for their sin, but it is condemned in Christ and removed.”

It was because our Savior came in the likeness of sinful flesh that this could be accomplished. Here Paul is using the term *flesh* as a synonym for human nature as it was originally created and not as an identifier of those aspects of people that are opposed to God. To be the true mediator between God and human beings, the Son of God had to take on a human nature and live as a human being. His human nature is entirely in common with ours except for one thing—it never suffered the effects of the fall. Christ is a true man, but He is said to have the likeness of sinful flesh because His flesh—His humanity—has never been tainted by sin. The early church father John Chrysostom writes, “Christ did not have sinful flesh but flesh which, though it was like ours by nature, was sinless. From this it is plain that flesh is not sinful by nature. It was not by taking on a different kind of flesh nor by changing ours into something different that Christ caused it to gain the victory over sin and death.”

SETTING ONE'S MIND ON THE SPIRIT

ROMANS 8:4–6 “Those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. For to set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace” (vv. 5–6).

Humanity's fundamental problem is its estrangement from God, which results in eternal death if it is not rectified (Gen. 2:15–17; Rom. 6:23; Eph. 2:11–12). Condemnation is the only end for those who do not have their sins covered, but for those who have been justified in Christ, there is no condemnation (Rom. 1:18–5:1). This state of being free from the Lord's condemnation is permanent and perpetual—there is no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus, for in Him we are set free from the law of sin and death (8:1–2).

God secured this release by succeeding where His law failed. His law, while good in itself, cannot solve the problem of sin because it cannot give sinners what they need to be righteous before Him or free them from sin and death (7:7–25). Another way had to be found, one that is not dependent on our law keeping and that does not arbitrarily set aside God's standards. When the Lord condemned sin in the sinless flesh of His Son, He did what His law in the possession of sinful flesh could not do (8:3). Jesus satisfied the curse of the law in our behalf, so we need fear it no longer. He bore our penalty, and our just Lord would never commit the great injustice of making those in Christ serve a sentence He had completed for us.

But God did not only condemn sin in order that justice could be done in our salvation. He also provided, in Christ's atonement, a way for us to fulfill the law as we walk in the Spirit (v. 4). The sense here is likely twofold. First, the law is fulfilled in us via imputation. The condemnation and elimination of our sin cleaned the slate, so to speak, for Christ's righteousness to be imputed to us (2 Cor. 5:21). Legally speaking, God sees us as law-keepers—He sees that His law has been fulfilled in us—because when He looks at us in a judicial sense, He sees Christ. Jesus provides in our justification the perfection that God requires to live in His presence, and this perfection can be credited to us only if we first admit that we cannot achieve it.

Our walking in the Spirit is evidence that we have been justified, so Romans 8:4 also points to Christians' experiential fulfillment of the law. That is developed more in verses 5–6, where we see that setting our minds on the Spirit is life and peace. In bearing the curse of God's law, Christ provided for the Spirit of God to be poured out on us (Gal. 3:13–14). Since we have been counted righteous in Christ, the Holy Spirit can live within us and move us to set our minds continually on Him, and we enjoy His life and peace even now.



CORAM DEO

Living before the face of God

The Holy Spirit empowers us to obey God now, but He does not perfect us in this life. John Calvin comments on Romans 8:1–2: “Wherever the real fear of God is vigorous, it takes away from the flesh its sovereignty, though it does not abolish all its corruptions.” We should have a realistic expectation of how far we will progress in the Spirit, but not a defeatist attitude. By faith, through the Spirit, we will grow in conformity to Christ.

FOR FURTHER STUDY

Ezekiel 39:29
John 20:22
Acts 9:31
1 Corinthians 6:19–20

THE BIBLE IN A YEAR

Genesis 8–11
Matthew 5

THE MIND SET ON THE FLESH

ROMANS 8:7–8 “The mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God’s law; indeed, it cannot. Those who are in the flesh cannot please God.”



CORAM DEO

Living before the face of God

In his commentary *Romans*, John Murray says that to be hostile to God “is nothing other than total depravity and ‘cannot please God’ is nothing less than total inability.” On our own, we are so hostile to God that we would have nothing to do with Him. If He were merely to offer us salvation, it would not be enough. To save us, He must change our hearts, for we would never choose Him otherwise.

FOR FURTHER STUDY

Ecclesiastes 9:3b
Micah 7:2–6
Matthew 7:18
Hebrews 11:6

THE BIBLE IN A YEAR

Genesis 12–14
Matthew 6

Paul’s focus in Romans 8 can be summed up as “life in the Spirit,” as the chapter continually emphasizes the work of the Holy Spirit in the one who has trusted in Christ alone for salvation. Among the greatest privileges Christians experience is the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, by whom believers grow in the grace and knowledge of Christ.

Because the Holy Spirit dwells within us, we now enjoy the life of the world to come. We will consider this more in a few days when we study Romans 8:10–11. Today, we are in verses 7–8, which illustrate the reality of life in the Spirit by way of a contrast, explaining that those who live in the flesh cannot enjoy true life now or in the age to come. First, we must note that while there is a sense in which Christians can live in the flesh—according to the remnants of our fallenness—believers do not set their minds on the flesh the way that unregenerate people do. By no means are we downplaying the difficulty of ongoing sin in the believer’s life. Christians can even fall into grievous sin, and we must never think that there is any transgression we are above committing. Scripture shows that true believers can murder, commit adultery, and even deny Christ (2 Sam. 11:1–12; Matt. 26:69–75). Still, there is a change that happens upon conversion that means we are no longer in the flesh. We sin and grieve the Spirit, but true believers in Jesus never find lasting satisfaction in doing so. Christians are not controlled by the mind-set of the flesh, for if we were, we could not persevere in faith, and perseverance is granted to all who are justified in Christ (Rom. 8:29–30; Phil. 2:12–13).

The unconverted—those who set their minds on the flesh—cannot experience true life either now or in the age to come. Fleshly minds do not submit to the law of God (Rom. 8:7). In fact, they do all they can to suppress it and its conviction (1:18–3:20). Moreover, the mind set on the flesh is hostile to God. It cannot please the Lord in any sense. It wants nothing to do with God and—in the supreme display of irrationality—causes a person to hate God so much that he would rather suffer in hell than please the Lord in heaven. As long as people are in the flesh, they cannot please God in any way (8:8). This means they cannot even make the choice to trust Christ, a choice that indeed pleases the Lord, for to trust in Jesus alone for salvation is to give up our rejection of God and His standards. Because of our fallenness, God must give us faith in Jesus if we are to believe. 📖

THE INDWELLING SPIRIT OF GOD

ROMANS 8:9 “You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him.”

Paul is a complex thinker, and his arguments often hold together several complementary truths without necessarily mentioning each of them specifically. One example of this is the Apostle’s discussion of life in the flesh and life in the Spirit.

Due to Paul’s teaching on our need to walk in the Spirit so as not to gratify the desires of the flesh (Gal. 5:16), we often think of living in the Spirit in purely subjective terms. We conceive of such life as pertaining only to what the Holy Spirit does in us as we follow Him in our sanctification. Yet the subjective experience of living according to the Spirit—while true and important—is not all that Paul has in mind when he talks about living in the Spirit.

In other words, there is an objective reality to life in the Spirit. Often, Paul’s contrast of flesh and spirit refers to a contrast between two ages—the era of sin and death associated with the administration of the old covenant and the Mosaic law’s inability to produce obedience versus the era of fulfillment that commenced with the coming of Christ. The age of the Spirit is characterized by freedom from sin’s power. It is not that the believers who lived before Christ failed to benefit from this empowerment. They did, though not with the same knowledge and fullness that we do. As such, the old covenant saints were really citizens of the new age of the Spirit who lived, as it were, outside of the actual time that they walked the earth. They walked the earth before the ministry of Christ, but they really belonged to the era of the Spirit in which we live. In any case, there has been a decisive change with the coming of Christ. The kingdom of God has been inaugurated, and the old era of sin and death is passing away as the new era of the Spirit becomes ever more present through the growth of the kingdom (2 Cor. 3; Gal. 4:1–7; see also Heb. 8). When Paul says we are in the Spirit, He often means that we have been brought into the new era of life and peace, that we enjoy the objective reality of justification and a righteous status before the Lord.

As noted above, life in the Spirit also has a subjective dimension. Once we lived in the flesh, being controlled by all that is against God, and could not please Him. However, because we have been transferred into the new era of the Spirit, we have received the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit. The Apostle assures us that if we have trusted in Christ, we have the Spirit, and our possession of the Spirit proves that we belong to Jesus (Rom. 8:9). 📖



CORAM DEO

Living before the face of God

Today’s passage helps us understand that there is no such thing as a Christian who does not possess the Holy Spirit. To belong to Christ Jesus is to possess His Spirit. If you have rested in Christ alone for salvation, the Holy Spirit does indwell you, and He is at work in your life. Let us remember this always, that we may be confident that the Spirit is working in and through us even when it is hard for us to see or feel it.

FOR FURTHER STUDY

Numbers 11:29
Joel 2:28–32
John 3:8
Romans 5:5

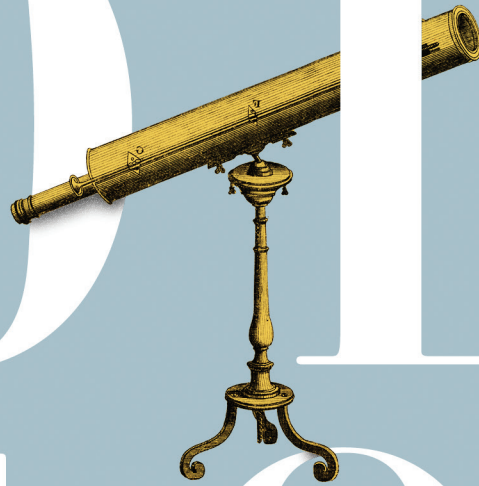
THE BIBLE IN A YEAR

Genesis 15–17
Matthew 7

THE WEEKEND

Genesis 18–22
Matthew 8

SOLE IDEE GLORIA





THE GREAT GIFT OF THE COVENANT

W. ROBERT GODFREY

The prophet Isaiah knew that the true and living God is a covenant-making and covenant-keeping God. He writes of a “covenant of peace” (Isa. 54:10) and an “everlasting covenant” (55:3) between God and His people. This covenant is clearly meant to be a blessing and encouragement to the people of God. But what is a covenant?

One brief definition of a covenant is “a structured relationship.” God establishes and structures the fellowship that He has with us. Thus, the covenant is like a treaty that specifies the benefits and duties that bind the two parties together.

Most Reformed theologians understand the Bible as teaching that the first covenant God initiated was with Adam in the garden of Eden. God structured His relationship with Adam in terms of duties and benefits. The Westminster Confession summarizes the teaching about God’s relationship with Adam: “The first covenant made with man was a covenant of works, wherein life was promised to Adam, and in him to his posterity, upon condition of perfect and personal obedience” (7.1). But Adam, and with him all of mankind, fell into sin and disobedience, and therefore deserved the sentence of death.

But God in mercy established a different covenant for sinners, which usually is called the *covenant of grace*. The Westminster Confession summarizes this gracious covenant as one “whereby He freely offereth unto sinners life and salvation by Jesus Christ; requiring of them faith in Him, that they may be saved; and promising to give unto all those that are ordained unto eternal life His Holy Spirit, to make them willing,

and able to believe” (7.3). The covenant of grace is presented as the blessing of life and salvation linked to the duty of faith, but even faith is a blessing that is given.

This covenant of grace was announced to Adam and Eve (Gen. 3:15) and is at the root of all other covenants in the Bible, including God’s covenants with Abraham, Moses, and David. They all come to fruition in the coming of Jesus and the great redemptive work that He did to save sinners.

Fulfillment of the previous covenants is actually the kernel of the gospel. Jesus is the second Adam, the head of a new covenant community and a new humanity. He fulfills the condition of perfect, personal obedience. By His death, He bears the wrath of God, so that in Him sinners might be forgiven and enlivened. All that Jesus did, He did to establish the covenant of grace between God and mankind.

In His covenant, the Lord assures His people of His unfailing care, which is more certain even than the mountains and the hills (Isa. 54:10). The earth itself will disappear before the mercy of the Lord will depart from His own regenerate people.

Sinners have an everlasting covenant because of the work of Christ. Because we have an everlasting and unchanging covenant, we have an everlasting inheritance. How rich is the covenant mercy of God to us. **TC**

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THE LIFE-GIVING SPIRIT

ROMANS 8:10–11 “If Christ is in you, although the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness. If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you.”

From beginning to end, Scripture teaches us that God cannot dwell among sinners unless an atonement for their sin has been made. We see this, for example, in the Day of Atonement and its rituals that annually cleansed the tabernacle and temple so that the Lord could continue to dwell in Israel (Lev. 16). It is also evident in the book of Revelation, where we read that those who enter the Lamb’s presence are washed in His blood (Rev. 7:9–17).

God is so pure that He cannot look at sin—He cannot tolerate it in His presence (Hab. 1:13). The Holy Spirit never could have come to dwell within us if Christ had not lived and died for His people. If Christ had not taken care of our sin by His sacrifice, and if our record had not been made one of righteousness via the imputation of Jesus’ perfect obedience, God never could have sent His Spirit to give us life (Gal. 3:10–14). As Romans 8:10 says, “The Spirit is life because of righteousness.” The Spirit dwells within us to bring us new life because righteousness has been imputed to us, because Jesus’ law keeping has been credited to our accounts and we are declared righteous in Him.

This life-giving Spirit is set in contrast to the death of the body. Death—bodily and spiritually—is the consequence for sin (Gen. 2:15–17). Apart from the indwelling Spirit of God, we can have no true life, because the absence of the Spirit proves that the Lord has not justified us, and without justification, there can be no life (Rom. 3:21–26). But if we have been justified, we do have the Spirit, and though our physical bodies still die, this death is no longer for our transgressions as it is for the unbeliever; rather, it serves to evidence the fact that God has not yet removed the presence of sin from us. This death is only temporary, however; the Holy Spirit who dwells in us now will one day give new life to our mortal bodies. Our souls go to be with God at our deaths, and our bodies lie in the grave. At the last day, there will be a resurrection of our bodies, our souls will be reunited with them, and we will enjoy an imperishable, embodied existence (1 Cor. 15:42–49).

Salvation is a thoroughly Trinitarian work. If the Spirit dwells in us, then Christ dwells in us (Rom. 8:9–10). Christ and the Holy Spirit indwell one another, so to have the Spirit is to have Christ. But it is the Father’s Spirit as well, for by the Holy Spirit He raised Christ from the dead, and through the Spirit He gives life to the dead (v. 11). To experience the work of the Holy Spirit is to benefit from the work of all three persons of the Holy Trinity. **TC**



CORAM DEO

Living before the face of God

Today’s passage shows that while our justification in Christ guarantees our salvation, God’s work of salvation will not be completed in us until we enjoy resurrected life in the new heaven and earth. Our Creator is saving our souls, but He is redeeming the physical order as well. It, too, was originally very good—and will be so again. In the meantime, because it is being redeemed, we can enjoy the good gifts the Lord gives through the physical order.

FOR FURTHER STUDY

Job 19:25–27
Daniel 12:1–3
Matthew 27:45–54
Romans 6:5

THE BIBLE IN A YEAR

Genesis 23–24
Matthew 9

DEBTORS TO THE SPIRIT

ROMANS 8:12–13 “So then, brothers, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.”



CORAM DEO

Living before the face of God

John Murray writes, “The believer’s once-for-all death to the law and to sin does not free him from the necessity of mortifying sin in his members; it makes it necessary and possible for him to do so.” Our efforts to walk in holiness as we follow the Holy Spirit do not save us, but they show that the Lord has saved us. God is preparing us for heaven, and we are to serve Him in the Spirit’s power so that we will be readied for the consummation of His kingdom.

FOR FURTHER STUDY

Isaiah 32:9–20
Ezekiel 11:19–20
Galatians 6:7–8
1 Thessalonians 5:23

THE BIBLE IN A YEAR

Genesis 25–26
Matthew 10:1–25

Passivity is not an option in the Christian life. We are eternally free from condemnation in Christ (Rom. 8:1), but Scripture gives us no warrant for inactivity after we put our faith in Jesus. In fact, immediately after conversion we begin serving the Lord, though not to earn our salvation. Christ merited redemption for us, and we receive His benefits by trusting in Him only (3:21–26). Our spiritual effort is the fruit of the justifying declaration that we are righteous in Christ. God has imputed Christ’s righteousness to us through faith alone, declaring us righteous in Him. The Holy Spirit dwells in those who have been justified, and today’s passage reveals that we work with Him to grow in personal holiness (8:9–11; see Gal. 5:16–26).

Paul’s message in Romans 8:12–13 may seem disturbing at first. Is this passage stating that eternal life rests finally on our sanctification, our growth in holiness? This cannot be, for Paul assures us that everyone who is justified will be glorified (vv. 29–30). Justification, not sanctification, secures our glorification, our eternal life in God’s presence. Nevertheless, eternal life and sanctification are connected. John Murray, the famous twentieth-century Reformed theologian, explains this in his commentary *Romans*: “Here is an inevitable and invariable sequence, a sequence which God himself does not and cannot violate. To make [everlasting] life the [end] of life [according to] the flesh would be an inherent contradiction. God saves from the flesh but not in it.” In other words, the Lord applies salvation to the believer in an unalterable order. Justification secures our glorification, but sanctification is the road we travel between the two. It would not be fitting to bring people into glory, where they will be perfectly holy, if at their deaths they were still controlled by the flesh—by all that is opposed to God. Thus, although we will not be fully sanctified in this life, the Lord liberates us from the flesh’s dominion and sends His Spirit to reside with us and sanctify us in preparation for heaven.

Those who are ruled by the flesh hate God, having no desire to please Him (vv. 7–8). The last place such people want to be is in His presence. But Christians are no longer bound to the flesh; we are debtors to the Spirit (v. 12). We want to see the Lord in His holiness. God brings into heaven those who want to be there, and He overcomes our fleshly bondage in regeneration, eliminating our resistance and giving us a desire for Him. Because of that work that is His alone, we are free to work with the Spirit to be readied for life in His presence. **📖**

THE SPIRIT OF ADOPTION

ROMANS 8:14–15 “All who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, ‘Abba! Father!’”



CORAM DEO

Living before the face of God

As we continue our study of Romans, a book that is all about getting the gospel right, today’s passage provides us with a great opportunity to discuss again the importance of understanding the relationship of the indicative and the imperative in the Christian life. If we get this relationship wrong, we have missed what the gospel tells us about the outworking of our salvation. The indicative refers to what we are and the imperative is what we are called to do or to be. Scripture tells us that the imperative is grounded in the indicative. That is, we are not commanded to be something before God says that we are that something. The indicative comes first—because we are something, the Lord calls us to be that something. We are to become what we already are.

The indicative saves us because it is how God regards us in Christ. In Christ, we are righteous (2 Cor. 5:21). In Christ, we are holy (Heb. 10:10). In Christ, we are children of God (Eph. 1:5). There is a practical and experiential sense in which we become righteous and holy and live as children of the Lord, but we do not do any of those things to achieve a righteous, holy, or adopted status before God. That status is ours by God’s gracious declaration. If we think we have to become righteous, become holy, or otherwise reflect God in our actions before the Lord will see us as righteous, holy, or His sons and daughters, we are driven to despair and compromise the gospel of redemption by God’s work alone for His glory alone (Isa. 42:8; John 12:27–28).

Today’s passage features one of the indicatives that ground the imperatives Paul gives us in Romans 8. Recall that in verse 13, the Apostle says we will live if we mortify the deeds of the flesh—if we follow the lead of the Holy Spirit and stand against the remnants of the fallenness that plagues us. But it is not our mortification that merits eternal life, for verses 14–15 tell us that we already have this life as a permanent possession through the Spirit of adoption who enlivens us. Having given us His Spirit once for all, God tells us to walk in the Spirit. Our possession of the Spirit ensures our receiving the inheritance of eternal life, for we are adopted in Christ (Eph. 1:5), and in Him the Father loves us perfectly because He loves Christ perfectly. He will never cast us out of His family. He is not waiting for us to cross the finish line before He signs the adoption papers and makes us His children forever. We are His children in Christ, and just as He will never cast out Christ, He will never cast us out (John 6:37). **📖**

The Holy Spirit is called the Spirit of adoption, which is a great comfort to us as we fight sin. Outside of Christ, we are in a state of fear. Despite our best efforts to suppress the truth, every sin provokes terror, for we know our end is hell. Once we are in Christ, however, we know God will never kick us out of His family. The Spirit does a sweet work of conviction in Christians. In the midst of bringing repentance for our sin, He assures us that we are still His.

FOR FURTHER STUDY

Psalms 27
Hosea 11:1
Galatians 4:1–7
1 John 3:1

THE BIBLE IN A YEAR

Genesis 27–28
Matthew 10:26–42

THE SPIRIT'S INTERNAL WITNESS

ROMANS 8:16–17 “The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.”



CORAM DEO

Living before the face of God

Christians now find themselves in an “already/not yet” reality. Already we are children of God and heirs, but our possession of the full inheritance is not yet realized. Our possession of the Spirit now, however, is the guarantee that the inheritance is coming (Eph. 1:13–14). Today, take some time to reflect on the tremendous privilege of being a child of the Lord, and thank Him for the inheritance that is surely ours in Christ.

FOR FURTHER STUDY

Psalm 111
Matthew 5:5; 19:27–30; 25:31–46
1 Peter 1:3–5

THE BIBLE IN A YEAR

Genesis 29–30
Matthew 11

We become God’s sons and daughters in Christ via adoption, and this truth helps us maintain a proper understanding of humanity and the depth of God’s grace. Most people, at least in Western society, would affirm that we are all children of God. If this were true, however, there would be no reason why anyone would need to be saved. After all, what would be the point of Jesus’ ministry if we are all a part of God’s family and the recipients of His love? But the assumption that we are all children of the Lord fails to reflect biblical teaching, for the Bible does not teach that all people are God’s children. In fact, in our fallen condition apart from Christ, we are all children of the devil (John 8:39–47; Rom. 5:12–21). Due to our depravity, the only way we can become children is through adoption. Since the fall, we are not by nature a part of God’s family. Atonement must be offered and our disposition—inclined as it is toward sin because we sinned in Adam—must be changed. The extent of depravity is seen in that we are not inherently the children that the Lord made us to be (initially, Adam was God’s “son”; Luke 3:38). The depth of God’s grace is evident in that our Father nevertheless adopts believers as His children in Christ (John 1:12–13).

Our adoption is a legal declaration that establishes the deepest of relationships. We are privileged to call God “Abba” (Rom. 8:15). The word “Abba,” taken from the Aramaic language spoken by Jesus and other residents of first-century Palestine, was the most intimate term people used to address their fathers. That we can use it for God indicates that He enters into the closest familial relationship possible with His people.

God the Holy Spirit bears witness with our spirits that we belong to Him as His children (v. 16). There is an internal testimony within the hearts of believers that assures them of God’s fatherhood and preservation of them as His beloved sons and daughters. Note that the Spirit does not give testimony apart from His Word. Paul has to tell us that we are children of God, just as the Lord has always given an objective word to His people through inspired writers. The Spirit takes this external Word and confirms it internally. He provides subjective assurance that God’s objective Word applies to us when we believe.

Because we are children, we are also heirs (v. 17). Paul alludes here to the grand promises to Abraham of land and blessing (Gen. 12:1–3). In Christ, we have an inheritance awaiting us. The world is ours by legal right, and one day we will possess it in its fullness. **✚**

THE THIRD PERSON OF THE TRINITY

EPHESIANS 4:30 “Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.”



CORAM DEO

Living before the face of God

That the Holy Spirit who dwells within us is God Himself points both to the awesome privilege and the solemn responsibility we have as God’s people. Although we are forgiven in Christ, the fact that the Spirit is God should heighten our resolve to mortify sin by His power. When we fail to do so, we offend the Creator of all things, who is gracious indeed but who always wants us to remember the high cost for this grace—the death of the Son.

FOR FURTHER STUDY

Genesis 1:1–2
Matthew 28:18–20
1 Corinthians 2:11
2 Corinthians 13:14

THE BIBLE IN A YEAR

Genesis 31–32
Matthew 12:1–21

THE WEEKEND

Genesis 33–37
Matthew 12:22–13:23

Throughout our study of Romans 8, we have been examining the work of the Holy Spirit in God’s children, those who have been justified and adopted in Christ. Paul’s teaching in this chapter of Romans tells us much about the Holy Spirit, but the Bible has more to say about Him. For the next week, we are pausing our study of the epistle to the Romans in order to consider the rest of the biblical witness to the Spirit, using Dr. R.C. Sproul’s teaching series *The Person and Work of the Holy Spirit* to guide our study.

As we begin our consideration of the Holy Spirit, it is important for us to remember that when we are talking about the Spirit, we are talking about a person. The Holy Spirit loves and can be loved. He can be grieved (Eph. 4:30). At the same time, while the Spirit is a person Himself, He is not a person with an independent existence and a unique nature or essence. Instead, the Holy Spirit shares His essence fully with the Father and the Son. We worship a Trinity (Matt. 28:19–20), a God who has one essence but who is three persons. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit can be distinguished, but they cannot be pulled apart. Each one of Them is fully God and possesses all of the divine attributes. The Spirit does not possess a different omnipotence, for example, than the Father and the Son do. They all have the same omnipotence. The three persons subsist within the one divine being—They each have Their own particular identities but Their essence is one and the same. This is a mystery, but the important thing to note is that Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are not three distinct gods existing alongside one another but three distinct persons within the divine essence who share fully in all that makes God who He is.

Scripture teaches in a number of ways that the Holy Spirit is fully God. One key passage is Acts 5:1–11, where Ananias and Sapphira lie about the proceeds they derived from the sale of their property. They are said to have lied to the Holy Spirit and to have lied not to man but “to God” (v. 4). To lie to the Holy Spirit is to lie to God because the Spirit is fully and completely God. This is why grieving the Spirit is something to be avoided. When we persist in sin, we are grieving the Spirit, and by grieving the Spirit, we grieve God. It is not that we provoke the Lord to get depressed—which would be impossible—but that we turn ourselves away (albeit temporarily) from His empowerment and assurance. **✚**



WHAT MORE CAN HE SAY?

JOHN MACARTHUR

The Reformation principle of *sola Scriptura* is not only about the authority of God's Word; it also affirms the inerrancy, perspicuity (clarity), and sufficiency of Scripture. Those are essential features of the Bible's authority. They are principles that cannot be over-stressed because all of them go against the drift of today's stylish neo-evangelicalism.

For more than a century, religious leaders captivated by skepticism have relentlessly caviled at the inerrancy of Scripture. More recently, the perspicuity of Scripture has been questioned and attacked by people enthralled with the postmodern notion that meaning is always elusive.

But perhaps the most subtle and sinister attack on the Bible has been the casual denial of Scripture's sufficiency—by modernists and postmodernists alike. Even some ostensibly conservative evangelicals no longer seem truly confident that the Bible alone is a fully sufficient resource for knowing God, glorifying Him, and pursuing His will.

We see this trend, for example, in the widespread belief that secular psychology offers a remedy for human woes that is more comprehensive, more potent, and more reliable than Scripture's remedy. The same attitude is evident in the way managers, entrepreneurs, comedians, and showmen are seen as more effective models for church leadership than the pastor who faithfully preaches the Word. It is especially manifest in the quest for fresh revelations, personal prophecies, and oth-

er charismatic novelties that supersede and supplant the authority of Scripture.

Vast numbers of people who profess faith in Christ today do not really believe that the truth contained in Scripture is sufficient to meet all our spiritual needs. That failure to affirm and defend the sufficiency of Scripture is a recipe for apostasy.

To deny the Bible's sufficiency is to subvert its authority while opening the door for all kinds of alternative opinions and phony revelations. That, in turn, breeds confusion and chaos—precisely the kind of spiritual and doctrinal commotion that currently dominates the broad evangelical movement.

All Scripture is God-breathed; thus, it is “profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work” (2 Tim. 3:16–17). There is no need “to go beyond what is written” (1 Cor. 4:6). Scripture is perfect, sure, right, pure, clean, true, and righteous altogether—adequate for every spiritual need we face, from the conversion of the soul to our perfection in glory (Ps. 19:7–9).

We must get back to the principle of *sola Scriptura* and reaffirm the historic Protestant belief in the Bible's sufficiency. Until that happens, the church will continue in its backslidden, directionless, and weakened state of disarray. **TC**

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THE SPIRIT OF TRUTH

JOHN 14:16–17 “I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you.”

The names assigned to people in Scripture have great importance. For example, at several significant points in redemptive history, God renames people, giving them a new name that provides important clues as to their identity and purpose in the Lord's plan. For example, Abram is renamed Abraham in Genesis 17:5 because God promises to make the patriarch “the father of a multitude of nations.” This is appropriate because the name Abraham literally means “father of a multitude.”

When we consider the Holy Spirit, we must note how interesting it is that His name is *Holy Spirit*. Scripture tells us that “God is spirit” (John 4:24), so this means that the Father is spirit and the Son, in His divine nature, is spirit as well. Yet the Father and the Son do not bear the name *Spirit* as the Holy Spirit does. Why is this the case? The answer—at least in part—seems to be that the third person of the Trinity bears the name *Holy Spirit* because of the particular work that is His. Though the Father, Son, and Spirit are involved in all that God does, the Holy Spirit comes particularly to the fore in regeneration. He provides the inward transformation—the change of our spirits—that gives us what we need to trust in Christ (3:1–8). The Holy Spirit strengthens us within in our sanctification (Eph. 3:16). He does a spiritual work in making us holy in our hearts and minds; thus, it is particularly appropriate for Him to be named *Holy Spirit*.

Part of what makes the Holy Spirit holy—indeed, part of what makes all three persons of the Trinity holy—is His commitment to the truth. The Holy Spirit also holds the title *Spirit of truth* (John 14:16–17), which is likewise related to the work He does inside of us to convict our minds of the truth and to cause us to embrace God's truth with all of our hearts. He is also the Spirit of truth because He is set in opposition to the spirit of antichrist or the spirit of error (1 John 4:1–6). John informs us that error is ultimately rooted within. Those who lie and who do not receive the truth of Christ do so because they are lying spirits, which can refer either to the fallen souls of unregenerate men, Satan and his minions, or both. These spirits are unseen to the human eye, but they show themselves when people teach and believe lies about the Lord. Similarly, the Holy Spirit is unseen to the human eye, but He shows Himself wherever people love and teach the truth of God's revelation in Christ (1 Cor. 12:3). **TC**



CORAM DEO

Living before the face of God

In order for us to be rightly related to God, we must know Him, and we cannot know Him if we are not concerned with the truths about Him taught in His Word. This is why believers must be concerned with God's truth more than anything else. Love for the truth is something that the Holy Spirit must grant us, and hunger for the truth of God's revelation is one sure sign that the Lord has done His work in us. Do you have a love for God's truth?

FOR FURTHER STUDY

Isaiah 35:13–16
John 16:13
2 Thess. 2:13–15
1 John 5:6–11

THE BIBLE IN A YEAR

Genesis 38–40
Matthew 13:24–58

NUMBERS 11:1–30 “Moses said to him, ‘Are you jealous for my sake? Would that all the LORD’s people were prophets, that the LORD would put his Spirit on them!’” (v. 29).



CORAM DEO

Living before the face of God

We do not always appreciate the blessing we have as those who live under the administration of the new covenant. Had we lived under the old covenant, most of us would likely not have been granted a special anointing for ministry. Living under the new covenant, each of us who believes in Christ has been anointed and given gifts to serve God’s people. We can serve the Lord confidently, knowing that He will use us to advance His kingdom.

FOR FURTHER STUDY

2 Chronicles 15
1 Corinthians 12:1–11
1 Peter 4:14

THE BIBLE IN A YEAR

Genesis 41
Matthew 14:1–21

In reading the Old Testament, we are often struck by the great faith that many of the people displayed, as well as the way in which so many people did great acts in the power of the Holy Spirit. For example, consider the judge of Israel named Samson. Judges 14:19 tells us that “the Spirit of the LORD rushed upon” Samson, enabling him to defeat many people at Ashkelon. This is just one of many such instances in Samson’s life, and we read of many others in the Old Testament who were empowered by the Spirit as Samson was.

As we read the Old Testament, however, it can be easy to think that such empowerment was more common than it actually was. In fact, very few of the old covenant people of God received any significant power for ministry from the Holy Spirit. Individuals such as David and the prophets were exceptions. The vast majority of people in the nation were not anointed by the Spirit for ministry. Those who were saved by resting in the promises of God did so only because the Spirit regenerated them. Since those in the flesh cannot please the Lord (Rom. 8:8), the people who lived under the old covenant administration had no capacity to make the God-pleasing decision of repentance and faith apart from the Holy Spirit’s regenerating work. Yet, it seems from reading the Old Testament that some of those whom the Holy Spirit regenerated did not receive an extra impartation of the Spirit for ministry. Most of the people whom the Spirit regenerated and saved under the old covenant were not given extra power for service.

In fact, one characteristic of the old covenant period is its longing for all of the people of God to be anointed and empowered by the Holy Spirit for ministry. This was Moses’ hope, as we see in today’s passage. When Joshua became concerned that some others in Israel were prophesying in the Spirit, he wanted them to stop. Yet Moses replied, “Would that all the LORD’s people were prophets, that the LORD would put his Spirit on them!” (Num. 11:29).

The hope for the Spirit to empower all of the saints of God for ministry becomes more pronounced in the Prophets. Seeing that the Israelites had not been able to keep the covenant, the prophets saw that the people of the Lord would have to receive the Holy Spirit in a new and powerful way to fulfill their vocation. Thus, prophets such as Joel looked forward to the day when the Spirit would anoint all believers, gifting them for ministry so that they could proclaim God’s truth with power (Joel 2:28–32).

ACTS 19:1–7 “When Paul had laid his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they began speaking in tongues and prophesying. There were about twelve men in all” (vv. 6–7).



CORAM DEO

Living before the face of God

All Christians are theologians because all believers develop ideas about God that shape who they are and what they do. The question is whether we are going to be good theologians or bad theologians. Good theologians determine their theology by God’s Word, seeking to be faithful to its teaching and not to make their experiences determinative of the truth. Let us strive to be good theologians who follow God’s Word.

Looking back over the twentieth century, few could deny that one of the most significant movements in the church and even the entire world has been the charismatic or Pentecostal movement. Talk of the presence and power of the Holy Spirit has been at the forefront of both popular and academic theological discussions, and this has been due in large part to the spread of Pentecostalism and its claims that sign gifts such as healing, prophecy, and speaking in tongues continue today.

A key tenet of the Pentecostal or charismatic movement is the claim that believers receive a second work of the Holy Spirit after conversion. One can believe in Christ without being baptized in the Holy Spirit—without receiving the Spirit in power at some point after one’s conversion to Christ. Essentially, this view teaches that one can be a believer without having the Holy Spirit or at least without having Him in all His fullness. One must pray specifically to receive the Holy Spirit; He does not automatically indwell a Christian with power and gifts for ministry upon conversion.

Belief in this second work—this baptism—of the Holy Spirit comes from personal experience and a certain reading of the book of Acts. Many people have testified to a change that happened to them after experiencing this Spirit baptism. They speak of a movement from a dry or ordinary spiritual life to one that is vibrant and powerful. Further, many people read the Acts of the Apostles, see that God promised to send His Spirit upon the Apostles who were already believers (Acts 1:1–11), read of the Spirit’s coming at Pentecost and showing His presence by the gift of tongues (2:1–3), and then conclude that this sequence is normative for Christians throughout history. The fact that the book of Acts records some believers’ apparently receiving the Holy Spirit after having been disciples for some time (for example, 19:1–7) is also taken as further evidence for a post-conversion baptism of the Spirit.

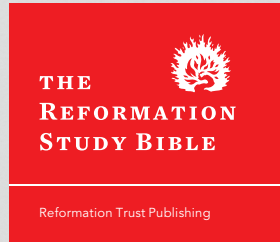
Few would deny that believers sometimes enjoy post-conversion encounters with God that can be turning points in their spiritual lives. The question is whether these represent the coming of the Spirit to reside in a believer in whom He had not dwelt before. Tomorrow, we will consider this issue more carefully, but today, we conclude with an admonition that our experiences, while important, cannot be determinative of our theology. Human beings often deceive themselves (Jer. 17:9), so we need the Word of God for sound doctrine.

FOR FURTHER STUDY

Deuteronomy 13:1–5
Isaiah 66:2
2 Timothy 3:16–17
Hebrews 4:12–13

THE BIBLE IN A YEAR

Genesis 42–43
Matthew 14:22–36



BEHOLD WONDROUS THINGS

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1 CORINTHIANS 12:13 “For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit.”



CORAM DEO

Living before the face of God

Positing a second blessing of the Holy Spirit creates a Christian caste system. It divides the church into Spirit-haves and Spirit-have-nots. This leads to feelings of superiority or inferiority depending on the group into which we fall, which is contrary to how we are to regard ourselves and others (Phil. 2:5–11). If we are in Christ, we have His Spirit, and we do not need to look for a second blessing experience.

FOR FURTHER STUDY

Numbers 11:29
1 Corinthians 10:1–4
Ephesians 4:4–6
1 Peter 3:18–22

THE BIBLE IN A YEAR

Genesis 44–45
Matthew 15:1–20

Yesterday, we noted that the modern charismatic or Pentecostal movement derives its theology of a second blessing of the Holy Spirit after conversion from certain texts in the book of Acts in which it seems that at least some disciples did not receive the indwelling and empowering of the Spirit until sometime after their conversion to Christ. We see in Acts 2, for example, the Spirit coming upon the Apostles after they had been following Jesus for many years. In Acts 19:1–7, we read of people in Ephesus who had been disciples for a while without having received the Holy Spirit. It is possible that these Ephesian disciples were not actually Christians but were only disciples of John the Baptist, but it is more likely that they were actually people who had believed in Jesus and were just poorly instructed (since they did not even know of the Holy Spirit). Assuming that they were genuine Christians before Paul baptized them and they received the Spirit, we have another example of people who had been saved and yet did not have the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

Making episodes such as these normative for the whole of Christian history is problematic. First, they occurred during the Apostolic period, which is foundational by definition, with many events never to be repeated in church history (Eph. 2:19–22). This is confirmed by Jesus’ words in Acts 1:8, where our Lord says the disciples will receive power from the Holy Spirit to take the gospel from Jerusalem to Judea to Samaria to the ends of the earth. If we follow the progression of the post-conversion baptisms of the Holy Spirit in the book of Acts, they follow this geographical sequence. These baptisms occur in Jerusalem/Judea (Acts 2; 10), Samaria (8:14–17), and Ephesus (the ends of the earth; see 19:1–7). They confirm the truth of Jesus’ words that the gospel would go to those areas. Spirit baptisms were evidence to the church in the first century that the gospel was to go forth to all nations and were not meant as examples of the normal Christian experience.

Second, the explicit Apostolic teaching on the baptism of the Spirit indicates that a second blessing experience of the Holy Spirit was never meant to be a continuing phenomenon. When the Apostles address the issue of Spirit baptism in their epistles, it is described as a universal experience and not one that only certain believers enjoy. As Paul indicates in today’s passage, we were all baptized in one Spirit into one body (1 Cor. 12:13). He knows of no group of believers who have not been filled with the Holy Spirit. **TC**

1 CORINTHIANS 2:6–16 “These things God has revealed to us through the Spirit. For the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God” (v. 10).



CORAM DEO

Living before the face of God

Without the Holy Spirit’s work of illumination, we will never understand the Bible in a saving way. Many people read the Bible, know what it teaches, but never believe its message. It is not that they lack intelligence. They do not believe because they have not been granted the ability to do so. Let us thank God every day that He has granted us the capacity to trust in His Word, and let us ask Him to illumine our study every time we read it.

Today, we are concluding our brief study of the person and work of the Holy Spirit with a look at the Spirit’s work of illumination. You may remember that in our study of Romans 8:16–17, we spoke of the internal testimony of the Holy Spirit, which tells us that the Spirit confirms to us that we are the children of God if we do in fact belong to Him. We noted that this subjective internal testimony operates in conjunction with His objective and external Word. Paul tells us that the Spirit confirms our adoption internally in the midst of a passage that tells us unequivocally that we have been adopted (vv. 12–17). The Word operates externally by our reading and hearing it, and the Spirit works internally to apply it to us. The Apostle did not expect the Spirit to work apart from the Apostolic testimony in order to reassure us of our sonship; he expected the Spirit to work in and through the Apostolic preaching and teaching to confirm in our hearts that we are God’s children.

Divine illumination and the internal testimony of the Holy Spirit are closely related. In both cases, the Spirit works in and through the inscripturated words of God’s prophets and Apostles. When it comes to divine illumination, however, we are speaking more about the Holy Spirit’s work to give us understanding of Scripture than we are talking about the Spirit’s confirmation that we are God’s children. There are times in our lives when we are reading the Bible and are suddenly struck by something in the text we have never noticed before. Perhaps we see how the passage applies to our specific context. Maybe we understand the contours of an argument that escaped us previously. These are examples of the Holy Spirit’s work of illumination.

In 2 Corinthians 2:6–16, the Apostle describes this work of illumination. It involves the Spirit’s searching the depths of God (v. 10), not because He does not know the mind of God—for the Holy Spirit is God—but in order to grant to us the understanding that the Lord wants us to have. In other words, He searches the mind of God for our sake. He does not just open our minds and hearts at conversion; instead, He continues throughout our Christian lives to make the gospel clear to us and to convince us of its truth.

This work of illumination does not operate by giving us secret insight that one cannot derive by reading the text in context. Scripture is not a code book or the basis for fanciful allegorizing. Illumination, rather, takes what is already there and makes it real to us. **TC**

FOR FURTHER STUDY

Psalms 119:18
2 Corinthians 3:12–18
1 John 2:20

THE BIBLE IN A YEAR

Genesis 46–48
Matthew 15:21–39

THE WEEKEND

Genesis 49–Exodus 4
Matthew 16



THE WEEKEND AND THE LORD'S DAY

DEREK W.H. THOMAS

The weekend. The very term evokes what, exactly? Fun? Entertainment? Sleeping in? Brunch? Sports? And what exactly does *weekend* include? Friday afternoon, Saturday, and Sunday? Interesting, isn't it, how Sunday gets wrapped into the concept of the week's end, when Scripture would have us think in an entirely different way—with Sunday as the *beginning* rather than the end of the week.

Avoiding for a minute the issue of how Sunday should be observed, let's think about the psychological effect of viewing Sunday as the beginning of the week. What difference does that make?

First, it clearly defines a gospel shape to the week—beginning with gracious rest and followed by grateful work. This is in contrast to the shape of the old covenant pattern—work followed by rest. There is no indication in this that during the period of the Old Testament there was no understanding of the gospel—far from it. Where, after all, did Paul go to explain justification by faith alone apart from the works of the law? To Abraham and David (Rom. 4:1–12, citing Gen. 15:16 and Ps. 32:1–2).

Second, the Lord's Day—yes, that's what the early Christians called it (Rev. 1:10), signaling thereby that this day had a status distinct from other days—is special. So special, in fact, that this particular day is denoted as belonging to the Lord. Do not all days belong to the Lord? Is not God—Father, Son and Holy Spirit—Lord of space and time? Yes, He is. Nevertheless, early Christians felt it important to recog-

nize the first day of the week (Sunday by our reckoning, though in all likelihood, sundown Saturday to sundown Sunday in theirs) as having a special status and consequent obligation.

Third, the Lord's Day is a gift. Each week, we are provided with an opportunity to gather together as a fellowship, a family, with Jesus as our Elder Brother. Our Father calls us together for worship—to sing, to pray, to read Scripture and hear it expounded, and to baptize and share a meal together—signs and seals of all the blessings and privileges of the gospel and of the covenant of grace that lies behind it. Sundays are fitness enhancing, ensuring the health of our souls. It is a time of spiritual nourishment, to be used wisely and with discipline—profiting from the Lord's Day does require effort and resolve on our part, including preparation and expectation. Here, as elsewhere in the Christian life, the saying is true that “you do not have, because you do not ask” (James 4:2).

The Puritans referred to the Lord's Day as “the market Day of the soul”—viewing a well-spent Lord's Day as preparation for the working week that would follow. And here's a thought: Is our work viewed with dread and foreboding because we do not utilize the gift of the Lord's Day to the full?

Enjoy your Lord's Day.

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THE GLORY TO BE REVEALED

ROMANS 8:18 “I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.”

We return to Romans 8 today, picking up our expositional study in verse 18. To set up today's devotional, let us recall verse 17, which says that being glorified with Christ is in some way a consequence of suffering with Him. Of course, we know that suffering with and for Jesus cannot be the meritorious basis for our glorification, God's perfecting us in the life to come. After all, our being declared righteous in Christ in our justification secures our glorification, and the meritorious basis of our justification is the perfect righteousness of Jesus, imputed to our accounts through faith alone (vv. 29–30; see 4:1–8; 5:12–21). Nevertheless, suffering with Jesus proves we belong to Him. It is part of our sanctification, the path of holiness we travel before we receive in its fullness what is assuredly ours because of our justification. “A servant is not greater than his master,” so if our Master Jesus suffered, we will suffer as well (John 15:20).

Our suffering fills up “what is lacking in Christ's afflictions” (Col. 1:24). It is not that Christ's suffering is insufficient to save; rather, Paul has in mind the birth pains that characterize the transition from the old era of death to the new era in which all will be renewed. According to Scripture, there will be great tribulation for God's people before the old gives way to the new, for the current world system attempts to resist the Lord's consummation of His plan (Dan. 12:1; Matt. 24:3–8). Jesus is the true Israel—He is God's people par excellence—but we are God's people as well, so the birth pains of suffering must be felt by us as well. What is lacking is the sum total of tribulation that must occur before the new heaven and earth come. Because Jesus inaugurated the last days in His life, atoning death, resurrection, and ascension, there is suffering for the church from the point of His ascension until His return to consummate all things and transform creation itself. Our suffering fills up these birth pains; it is part of what will usher in the new creation. The new creation has been guaranteed by Jesus' work, but the suffering of God's people that precedes the consummation of the new creation—including our suffering—has not yet been completed.

Knowing this, we should not be discouraged. Paul tells us that our suffering is not worthy to be compared to the glory of the new heaven and earth (Rom. 8:18). It is not that our suffering is on one end of a spectrum and glory is on the other. There is no comparison between the two. The glory to come will far surpass even the best that we can imagine.



CORAM DEO

Living before the face of God

Dr. R.C. Sproul writes in his commentary *Romans*: “The difference between the present degree of pain we experience and the blessedness to which God has appointed His people is so immensely different that there is no way to compare them. Any comparison we come up with falls short.” When you are discouraged by your troubles, know that what is to come for you in Christ will be so wonderful that all your pain will be well worth it.

FOR FURTHER STUDY

Zephaniah 3:14–20
2 Corinthians 4:17
2 Timothy 2:1–13
Hebrews 11

THE BIBLE IN A YEAR

Exodus 5–6
Matthew 17

ROMANS 8:19–22 “For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God” (vv. 20–21).



CORAM DEO

Living before the face of God

Sin has consequences not only for ourselves but also for the entire creation. Because of what we did in Adam, the world suffers. One day, the suffering will be over, and this is a day for which even the earth hopes. In the meantime, we can alleviate the suffering of the world and all that is in it through good stewardship of its resources. This is one of our callings as Christians, and we fulfill it out of love for the Creator.

FOR FURTHER STUDY

Deuteronomy 30:1–10
2 Peter 3:12
Revelation 21

THE BIBLE IN A YEAR

Exodus 7–10
Matthew 18:1–20

Christianity has at times been called a pie-in-the-sky religion, one so focused on spiritual things and life in heaven after death that it is unconcerned with the here and now. To be sure, some believers have given others reason to hold this view. Some people talk about salvation as if it is exclusively spiritual, implying that God is concerned only with the souls of people and that this world is a throwaway in His eternal purposes.

Today’s passage should disabuse us of those notions. As the Apostle Paul indicates, the physical creation is not incidental to the Lord’s plans. Instead, the created order will be redeemed as well. In fact, creation is eagerly awaiting “the revealing of the sons of God” (Rom. 8:19). Even now, those who have been justified by faith alone in Christ alone have been adopted as the children of God, and we thereby have all the privileges that His sons and daughters are due in Christ because we have been graciously brought into His family (vv. 15–17; see 5:1–11). However, while the status and benefits merited by Jesus are fully ours even now, we do not yet experience them in their fullness. The remnants of sin still plague us, and our suffering continues. This will not last forever; at the consummation, our glory as God’s children will be revealed, and though we do not yet fully know what that will be like, we know it will be marvelous beyond all description (1 John 3:1–3).

Creation awaits the day of resurrection when we come into full possession of all that we have in Christ because at that point, the world will be set free as well (Rom. 8:20–22). Paul tells us that creation was “subjected to futility” and put in “bondage to corruption.” The Apostle refers here to the effects of the fall of mankind. As Genesis 3 indicates, Adam’s fall affected not only the human race but the physical world as well (vv. 16–19). God cursed the earth, and the disruption of the natural world since the fall is the evidence of its being subjected to futility. John Calvin comments, “The condemnation of mankind is imprinted on the heavens, and on the earth, and on all creatures.”

Though creation was unwillingly cursed—it did not commit the willful act of rebellion that led to its damaged and fallen state—it received this curse “in hope” (Rom. 8:20). When the Lord cursed the world, He included the hope of its salvation—the Messiah’s crushing of the serpent’s head (Gen. 3:15). In Christ, that has occurred, and the world is waiting for the fruit of this crushing to be fully evident in a renewed heaven and earth. **TC**

ROMANS 8:23–25 “Not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies” (v. 23).



CORAM DEO

Living before the face of God

Christians have a deep, persistent longing to be completely free from our fallenness. Sometimes we feel very impatient in waiting for freedom from the presence of sin, but the surety of its coming should cause us to grow in patience as we await the full and final outworking of God’s purposes. Since we know that we will be glorified, we can endure all of our shortcomings in the present, repenting over them as we look forward to what is to come.

FOR FURTHER STUDY

Psalm 35
Acts 1:6–11
Colossians 1:11–14
Revelation 6:9–11

THE BIBLE IN A YEAR

Exodus 11–12
Matthew 18:21–35

Since creation itself longs for the revealing of the glory of the children of God, the resurrection and revelation of all those who truly belong to Christ (Rom. 8:21), how much more do we who belong to Christ long for the final perfecting of our bodies as well as the revelation of who we are in the Savior? This assumption underlies today’s passage, which reminds us that not only is creation waiting for us to be revealed, but we also—and even more so—are waiting for that day when redemption will be consummated.

Paul says we “groan inwardly” while we wait for the final day (v. 23). Here the Apostle refers to the inward sighs and longings we express as we continue to feel the frustration of living as justified persons in a world where the effects of the fall are not yet eliminated. Our frustration is not indicative of doubt. The spirits of God’s children do not say—at least not perpetually and without resolution—“I am frustrated because I do not know whether God is ever going to finish what He started in me.” Instead, our inward groanings are akin to what David says in Psalm 13: “How long, O LORD?” (v. 1). David is confident that his prayer will be heard and that he is secure in God’s hand (vv. 5–6). Still, he wants to know when he will receive the answer to his plea. David wants to know how much longer before God shows Himself in the king’s experience and vanquishes fully and finally all of David’s foes (vv. 1–4). We, too, want to know how long it will be before our foes—the world, the flesh, and the devil—will be put down finally, never to rise again. The longing and internal frustrations we feel are born of our confidence that the Lord will glorify all whom He has justified (Rom. 8:29–30). Knowing that this is sure to happen makes us long for it to come, makes us cry out, “How much longer must I deal with my fallenness and the fallenness of the world?” This experience is similar to what Paul describes in Romans 7. We—because of our regeneration—want to do what is right, and yet we do not always do it. Thus, we want to enter that state in which it will be impossible for us to do other than our deepest heart desire in Christ, namely, to please God.

The Apostle describes that which we long for as our hope (8:24–25). Hope according to Scripture is not something that is uncertain; rather, hope refers to that which is certain but not yet seen or experienced in all its fullness. Glorification remains our hope because we do not yet see it, but knowing that it is certain helps us to wait for its revelation patiently. **TC**

ROMANS 8:26–27 “The Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words” (v. 26).



CORAM DEO

Living before the face of God

John Calvin comments, “Except we are supported by God’s hands, we are soon overwhelmed by innumerable evils . . . though we are in every respect weak, and various infirmities threaten our fall, there is yet sufficient protection in God’s Spirit to preserve us from falling, and to keep us from being overwhelmed by any mass of evils.” Our Creator Himself prays for us. That should leave us with no doubt that His perfect will for us will always be done.

FOR FURTHER STUDY

Isaiah 53
Romans 8:33–34
Philippians 1:18b–19
Hebrews 7:25

THE BIBLE IN A YEAR

Exodus 13–15
Matthew 19:1–15

Questions about the effectiveness of our prayers are on the minds of believers from the moment of conversion. What does it mean to pray according to God’s will? If I do not pray according to God’s will, how can the Lord use my prayers as He says He will? How can I be sure that the Father hears and answers my prayers?

Today’s passage deals with many of these issues, as the Apostle Paul gives us further reasons to be encouraged despite our ongoing weaknesses and our struggle with the flesh. The encouragement he gives in Romans 8:18–25 has to do with the certainty of our hope that we will be glorified. It is a future-oriented hope. Verses 26–27 provide encouragement with a focus more on our present circumstances. There is a reason beyond the certainty of our glorification for us to be confident in the present despite our weaknesses—the intercessory work of the Holy Spirit.

Because we still suffer the effects of the fall, our prayers in and of themselves are insufficient to make us persevere. Our limited knowledge of the situations in which we find ourselves, abiding selfishness, and many other factors prevent us from knowing God’s will for us specifically in all its fullness. We ought to pray only according to God’s will (1 John 5:14–15)—according to what He desires for us—but we cannot do that perfectly. Yet that should not lead us to stop praying or to believe our prayers will be ineffective, for God never considers our prayers in and of themselves. Paul says that the Spirit takes our imperfect prayers and makes them perfect. He intercedes alongside us and within us “with groanings too deep for words” (Rom. 8:26). Invisibly and inaudibly, He takes our prayers and makes them conform to the perfect will of the triune God. His ministry of intercession is effectual. God knows and attends to the mind of His Spirit as He prays for us (v. 27). He will always hear and grant the Spirit’s prayers. We need not fear that the imperfection of our prayers and the weakness of our flesh will prevent us from persevering to the end or keep us from waiting patiently for the final glory to come. God the Holy Spirit prays perfectly, and His requests for us are always granted. In his commentary *Romans*, Douglas J. Moo writes, “When we do not know what to pray for—yes, even when we pray for things that are not best for us—we need not despair, for we can depend on the Spirit’s ministry of perfect intercession ‘on our behalf.’”

ROMANS 8:28 “We know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.”



CORAM DEO

Living before the face of God

God works all things together for our good if we love Christ. Not just some or most things, but all things are used by Him for our ultimate good and His final glory, which is the highest good of all (Col. 1:27). When we walk through the most difficult things in life, we should not lose heart. Even if we cannot see it now, God is taking what others have planned for evil and using it for your good. If you are in Christ, He is working all things for your good.

The privileges of being justified and reconciled to God have been a central theme in Romans 8, as Paul has moved from the fact that we are no longer under condemnation in Christ to the indwelling Spirit who gives us new life to our adoption to the guaranteed inheritance of the new heaven and earth (vv. 1–25). Suffering with Jesus, however, is part of what we undergo as we await the final and full consummation of all things (vv. 16–17). In the midst of our suffering, we have hope because of the surety of the world to come and the intercessory work of the Holy Spirit (vv. 24–27).

Our inheritance in the world to come is assured, and that is the highest good imaginable. Because that is certain, we know that “for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose” (v. 28). This verse certainly ranks among the most comforting verses in all of Scripture. It assures us that all the suffering we endure, every circumstance of life, every success or failure—all of these God works together for our final good. Nothing is excepted. From the worst things that ever happen to us to the very best, the Lord is using it all for our good.

Note that the Apostle does not say “all things are good.” Paul would not have us deny that horrible things are horrible things. Instead, our assurance is that God works in and through these horrible things for an everlasting good. That includes evil. Although many Christians recoil at the thought that the Lord has anything to do with the evils that occur in this world, Scripture will not allow us to confess that evil is not a part of God’s all-encompassing plan and eternal decree. He works all things according to the counsel of His will (Eph. 1:11). Sin and wickedness are part of what He ordains (Prov. 16:4; Amos 3:6). That does not mean He is morally responsible for evil. God cannot be tempted with evil, nor can He ever sin (James 1:13). Nevertheless, evil is no accident; it is part of the Lord’s overarching plan for creation. There is great mystery here, to be sure, but we cannot deny what Scripture says about God’s sovereignty and evil simply because it makes us uncomfortable.

That even evil is part of the outworking of God’s plan is a great comfort. It assures us that there is purpose in every suffering, and that nothing can thwart the Lord’s intent to benefit His people. Dr. R.C. Sproul writes in his commentary *Romans*, “Evil is evil, but it is within the broader, eternal purpose of God and ultimately for his glory.”

FOR FURTHER STUDY

Genesis 50:20
Acts 2:22–24

THE BIBLE IN A YEAR

Exodus 16–18
Matthew 19:16–30

THE WEEKEND

Exodus 19–22
Matthew 20:1–16



SIN'S WAR AGAINST LOVE

TRILLIA J. NEWBELL

I hate sin. It is ugly. It disrupts life. It messes with precious relationships. It confuses the mind. Sin is pervasive. Sin affects us to our core. Sin wreaks havoc on every aspect of life, especially on our ability to keep the commandments to love God with all our heart and soul and mind and strength and to love our neighbor as ourselves. I think that's perhaps one reason Paul rebuked the Corinthians about their selfishness and division with verses about love:

Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. (1 Cor. 13:4–7)

Despite how familiar those verses might be, they truly are the way of love. The Corinthians had trouble loving one another. This difficulty was clear in their pursuit of spiritual gifts. Some had elevated their gifts (or perhaps certain gifts) over others. Paul reminded them, “There are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord” (12:4–5). He then explained that the church has many parts but is one body (vv. 12–30). And then, Paul made it clear that one could use the gifts they were elevating and do so completely in vain—without true love for others and only for selfish gain and glory (13:1–3).

The correction to the Corinthians' selfishness is the same helpful correction to our

selfishness and to the many sinful desires and struggles that cling so closely—love. If love is patient and kind, we will fight to learn to put on gentleness and kindness. Love does not insist on its own way—pride does, so we ask God to give us humility. Love is not irritable or resentful; therefore, every relationship, if it is beyond surface level, must be doused in the patience and forbearance that can only come from the power of Christ. Love bears with one another and is not selfish; love believes the truth and the best until proven otherwise. Love hopes for the absolute best in all situations and in the gospel that reconciles. Love endures with hardship and trouble. Love doesn't give up.

Now if you are like me, after reading and reflecting on these commands to love, you are likely pleading with God for help. We don't love the way we ought. But God has graciously given us His Spirit, who enables us to love. We love others not because we are good people, nor do we love God because of anything in and of ourselves (1 John 4:19). This is great news for us. It means we can ask God—the same God whose power changed our hearts of stone into hearts of flesh and whose power enables us to love Him—to use the same power to enable us to love our neighbor as ourselves. We will fail, but there's repentance and forgiveness available. Let's call out to God for help to put off that nasty, selfish sin, and to love. **TC**

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THE GOLDEN CHAIN OF SALVATION

ROMANS 8:29–30 “Those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son. . . . And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.”

Paul brings his discussion on life in the Spirit to a glorious climax in today's passage. Our indwelling by the Spirit signifies that we are adopted as God's children and not condemned, for the Holy Spirit cannot dwell within the person He sees as unholy and whose sin has not been atoned for (Rom. 8:1–17). Additionally, possessing the Holy Spirit shows that we will enjoy our full inheritance in glorified bodies in a new heaven and earth. He prays for us that we would persevere, and He assures us that God works all things together for our good if we love Christ (vv. 18–28). But there is one more reason to be confident in the Spirit's work and our final, glorious end, and that is the work of God in salvation.

Romans 8:29–30 features the sequence known as the golden chain of salvation, the inviolable order according to which our Creator saves His people. Although this chain does not specifically mention everything God does in redeeming us (we do not find the word *sanctification* in this passage), it does tell us that salvation is from start to finish a work of the Lord. It is not that God initiates our salvation and we complete it by our obedience. Our service to God is important and even a preparation for heaven, but it does not merit heaven or get us there finally. God alone saves. He starts the work and finishes it without any help from us.

First, God foreknows His people (v. 29). This does not mean that the Lord looks down “the corridors of time” and foreknows something about us such as the decision we will make when we hear the gospel. He does, of course, know such things, but such things are in a sense incidental. When Paul says God foreknew us, he is speaking of God's knowledge of us as persons. He is speaking of His decision to enter into a relationship with us, to set His love on us (9:13). It is because He chose to love us that we will believe. Only those whom God chooses to love in this special way can be saved, and all those whom He has chosen to love in this way will be saved. Dr. R.C. Sproul comments in his book *Romans*, “We could reasonably translate this text [Rom. 8:29], “Those whom he foreloved [those whom he knew in a personal, intimate, redemptive sense from all eternity] he predestined.”

The Lord's predestination ensures His call and justification of us, and that in turn ensures final glorification (v. 30). We are entirely in God's hands from eternity past. He chose to love us, to declare us righteous in Christ, and to adopt us. All those whom God justifies will be glorified. If we are in Christ now, we are in Him forever. **TC**



CORAM DEO

Living before the face of God

Augustine of Hippo comments on today's passage that “God elected believers in order that they might believe, not because they already believed.” God's choice of us precedes our choice of Him. If the Lord had not chosen us, we never would have chosen to believe in Him, and because He chose His people without any view to their own merits or choices, His people will certainly believe. His predestination of us means we are His forever.

FOR FURTHER STUDY

Genesis 25:19–28
Acts 13:48
Ephesians 1:3–10
2 Thessalonians 2:13

THE BIBLE IN A YEAR

Exodus 23–25
Matthew 20:17–34



GO DEEPER

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A Catechism on the Heart

SINCLAIR B. FERGUSON

SOMETIMES PEOPLE ASK authors, “Which of your books is your favorite?” The first time the question is asked, the response is likely to be “I am not sure; I have never really thought about it.” But forced to think about it, my own standard response has become, “I am not sure what my favorite book is; but my favorite title is *A Heart for God*.” I am rarely asked, “Why?” but (in case you ask) the title simply expresses what I want to be: a Christian with a heart for God.

Perhaps that is in part a reflection of the fact that we sit on the shoulders of the giants of the past. Think of John Calvin’s seal and motto: a heart held out in the palm of a hand and the words “I offer my heart to you, Lord, readily and sincerely.” Or consider Charles Wesley’s hymn:

*O for a heart to praise my God!
A heart from sin set free.*

Some hymnbooks don’t include Wesley’s hymn, presumably in part because it is read as an expression of his doctrine of perfect love and entire sanctification. (He thought it possible to have his longing for sinless perfection fulfilled in this world.)

But the sentiment itself is surely biblical.

But behind the giants of church history stands the testimony of Scripture. The first and greatest commandment is to love the Lord our God with all our heart (Deut. 6:5). That is why, in replacing Saul as king, God “sought out a man after his own heart” (1 Sam. 13:14), for “the LORD looks on the heart” (16:7). It is a truism to say that, in terms of our response to the gospel, the heart of the matter is a matter of the heart. But truism or not, it is true.

What this looks like, how it is developed, in what ways it can be threatened, and how it expresses itself are important questions that we cannot fully answer here. But, perhaps it will help us if we map out some preliminary matters in the form of a catechism on the heart:

Q.1. What is the heart?

A. The heart is the central core and drive of my life intellectually (it involves my mind), affectionately (it shapes my soul), and totally (it provides the energy for my living).

Q.2. Is my heart healthy?

A. No. By nature, I have a diseased heart.

From birth, my heart is deformed and antagonistic to God. The intentions of its thoughts are evil continually.

Q.3. Can my diseased heart be healed?

A. Yes. God, in His grace, can give me a new heart to love Him and to desire to serve Him.

Q.4. How does God do this?

A. God does this through the work of the Lord Jesus for me and the ministry of the Holy Spirit in me. He illumines my mind through the truth of the gospel, frees my enslaved will from its bondage to sin, cleanses my affections by His grace, and motivates me inwardly to live for Him by rewriting His law into my heart so that I begin to love what He loves. The Bible calls this being “born from above.”

Q.5. Does this mean I will never sin again?

A. No. I will continue to struggle with sin until I am glorified. God has given me a new heart, but for the moment He wants me to keep living in a fallen world. So day by day I face the pressures to sin that come from the world, the flesh, and the devil. But God’s Word promises that over all these enemies I can be “more than a conqueror through him who loved us.”

Q.6. What four things does God counsel me to do so that my heart may be kept for Him?

A. First, I must guard my heart as if ev-

erything depended on it. This means that I should keep my heart like a sanctuary for the presence of the Lord Jesus and allow nothing and no one else to enter.

Second, I must keep my heart healthy by proper diet, growing strong on a regular diet of God’s Word—reading it for myself, meditating on its truth, but especially being fed on it in the preaching of the Word. I also will remember that

my heart has eyes as well as ears. The Spirit shows me baptism as a sign that I bear God’s triune name, while the Lord’s Supper stimulates heart love for the Lord Jesus.

Third, I must take regular spiritual exercise, since my heart will be strengthened by worship when my whole being is given over to God in expressions of love for and trust in Him.

Fourth, I must give myself to prayer in which my heart holds on to the promises of God, rests in His will, and asks for His sustaining grace—and do this not only on my own but with others so that we may encourage one another to maintain a heart for God.

This—and much else—requires development, elaboration, and exposition. But it can be summed up in a single biblical sentence. Listen to your Father’s appeal: “My son, give Me your heart.”

THE SPIRIT SHOWS ME BAPTISM AS A SIGN THAT I BEAR GOD’S TRIUNE NAME, WHILE THE LORD’S SUPPER STIMULATES HEART LOVE FOR THE LORD JESUS.

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Preach the Word

STEVEN J. LAWSON

EVERY SEASON OF REFORMATION and every hour of spiritual awakening has been ushered in by a recovery of biblical preaching. This cause and effect is timeless and inseparable. J.H. Merle D'Aubigné, a noted Reformation historian, writes, "The only true reformation is that which emanates from the Word of God." That is to say, as the pulpit goes, so goes the church.

Such was the case in the Protestant Reformation of the sixteenth century. Martin Luther, John Calvin, and others were raised up by God to lead His church in this era. At the forefront, it was their recovery of expository preaching that helped launch this religious movement that turned Europe and, eventually, Western civilization upside down. With *sola Scriptura* as their battle cry, a new generation of biblical preachers restored the pulpit to its former glory and revived Apostolic Christianity.

The same was true in the golden era of the Puritans in the seventeenth century. A recovery of biblical preaching spread like wildfire through the dry religion of Scotland and England. A resurgence of authentic Christianity came as an army of biblical expositors—John Owen, Jere-

miah Burroughs, Samuel Rutherford, and others—marched upon the kingdoms of England and Scotland with an open Bible and uplifted voice. In its wake, the monarchy was shaken and history was altered.

The eighteenth century witnessed exactly the same. The Bible-saturated preaching of Jonathan Edwards, George Whitefield, and the Tennents thundered through the early Colonies. The Atlantic seaboard was electrified with the proclamation of the gospel, and New England was taken by storm. The Word was preached, souls were saved, and the kingdom expanded.

The fact is, the restoration of biblical preaching has always been the leading factor in any revival of genuine Christianity. Philip Schaff writes, "Every true progress in church history is conditioned by a new and deeper study of the Scriptures." That is to say, every great revival in the church has been ushered in by a return to expository preaching.

D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, preacher at Westminster Chapel, London, stated, "The most urgent need in the Christian Church today is true preaching; and as it is the greatest and the most urgent need in the Church, it is the greatest need of the

world also." If his diagnosis is correct, and this writer believes it is, then a return to true preaching—biblical preaching, expository preaching—is the greatest need in this critical hour. If a reformation is to come to the church, it must begin in the pulpit.

In his day, the prophet Amos warned of an approaching famine, a deadly drought that would cover the land. But this famine was not an absence of mere food or water, for this scarcity would be far more fatal. It would be a famine for hearing God's Word (Amos 8:11). Surely, the church today finds itself in similar days of shortage. Tragically, exposition is being replaced with entertainment, doctrine with drama, theology with theatrics, and preaching with performances. What is so desperately needed today is for pastors to return to their highest calling—the divine summons to "preach the word" (2 Tim. 4:1–2).

What is expository preaching? The Geneva Reformer John Calvin explained, "Preaching is the public exposition of Scripture by the man sent from God, in which God Himself is present in judgment and in grace." In other words, God is unusually present, by His Spirit, in the preaching of His Word. Such preaching starts in a biblical text, stays in it, and shows its God-intended meaning in a life-changing fashion.

This was the final charge of Paul to young Timothy: "Preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching" (2 Tim. 4:2). Such preaching

necessitates declaring the full counsel of God in Scripture. The entire written Word must be expounded. No truth should be left untaught, no sin unexposed, no grace unoffered, no promise undelivered.

A heaven-sent revival will only come when Scripture is enthroned once again in the pulpit. There must be the clarion declaration of the Bible, the kind of preaching that gives a clear explanation of a biblical

text with compelling application, exhortation, and appeal.

Every preacher must confine himself to the truths of Scripture. When the Bible speaks, God speaks. The man of God has nothing to say apart from the Bible. He must not parade his personal opinions in the pulpit. Nor may he expound worldly philosophies. The preacher is limited to one task—to preach the Word.

Charles Haddon Spurgeon said, "I would rather speak five words out of this book than 50,000 words of the philosophers. If we want revivals, we must revive our reverence for the Word of God. If we want conversions, we must put more of God's Word into our sermons." This remains the crying need of the hour.

May a new generation of strong men step forward and speak up, and may they do so loud and clear. As the pulpit goes, so goes the church. ■

**EXPOSITION
IS BEING
REPLACED WITH
ENTERTAINMENT,
DOCTRINE
WITH DRAMA,
THEOLOGY WITH
THEATRICALS, AND
PREACHING WITH
PERFORMANCES.**

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Is the Enemy of My Enemy My Friend?

R. ALBERT MOHLER JR.

WE ARE NOT LIVING in a season of peace. Thinking Christians must surely be aware that a great moral and spiritual conflict is taking shape all around us, with multiple fronts of battle and issues of great importance at stake. The prophet Jeremiah repeatedly warned of those who would falsely declare peace when there is no peace. The Bible defines the Christian life in terms of spiritual battle, and believers in this generation face the fact that the very existence of truth is at stake in our current struggle.

The condition of warfare brings a unique set of moral challenges to the table, and the great moral and cultural battles of our times are no different. Even ancient thinkers knew this, and many of their maxims of warfare are still commonly cited. Among the most popular of these is a maxim that was known by many of the ancients—“the enemy of my enemy is my friend.”

That maxim has survived as a modern principle of foreign policy. It explains why states that have been at war against one another can, in a very short period of time, become allies against a common enemy. In World War II, the Soviet Union began as an ally of Nazi Germany. Yet, it

ended the war as a key ally of the United States and Britain. How? It joined the effort against Hitler and became the instant “friend” of the Americans and the British. And yet, as that great war came to an end, the Soviets and their former allies entered a new phase of open hostility known as the Cold War.

Does this useful maxim of foreign policy serve Christians well as we think about our current struggles? That is not an uncomplicated question. On the one hand, some sense of unity against a common opponent is inevitable, even indispensable. On the other hand, the idea that a common enemy produces a true unity is, as even history reveals, a false premise.

We must not underestimate what we are up against. We face titanic struggles on behalf of human life and human dignity against the culture of death and the great evils of abortion, infanticide, and euthanasia. We are in a great fight for the integrity of marriage as the union of a man and a woman. We face a cultural alliance determined to advance a sexual revolution that will unleash unmitigated chaos and bring great injury to individuals, families, and the society at large. We are fighting to defend gender as part

of the goodness of God’s creation and to defend the very existence of an objective moral order.

Beyond all these challenges, we are engaged in a great battle to defend the existence of truth itself, to defend the reality and authority of God’s revelation in Scripture, and to defend all that the Bible teaches. A pervasive anti-supernaturalism seeks to deny any claim of God’s existence or our ability to know him. Naturalistic worldviews dominate in the academy, and the New Atheism sells books by the millions. Theological liberalism does its best to make peace with the enemies of the church, but faithful Christians have no way to escape the battles to which this generation of believers are called.

So, are the other enemies of our enemies our friends? Mormons, Roman Catholics, Orthodox Jews, and a host of others share many of our enemies in this respect. But, to what extent is there unity among us?

At this point, very careful and honest thinking is required of us. At one level, we can join with anyone, regardless of worldview, to save people from a burning house. We would gladly help an atheist save a neighbor from danger or even beautify the neighborhood. Those actions do not require a shared theological worldview.

At a second level, we certainly see all those who defend human life and human dignity, marriage and gender, and the integrity of the family as key allies in the current cultural struggle. We listen to each other, draw arguments from each other, and are thankful for each other’s support

of our common concerns. We even recognize that there are elements common to our worldviews that explain our common convictions on these issues. And yet, our worldviews are really quite different.

With the Roman Catholic Church, our common convictions are many, including moral convictions about marriage, human life, and the family. Beyond that, we together affirm the truths of the divine Trinity, orthodox Christology, and other doctrines

as well. But we disagree over what is supremely important—the gospel of Jesus Christ. And that supreme difference leads to other vital disagreements as well—over the nature and authority of the Bible, the nature of the ministry, the meaning of baptism and the Lord’s Supper, and an entire range of issues central to the Christian faith.

Christians defined by the faith of the Reform-

ers must never forget that nothing less than faithfulness to the gospel of Christ forced the Reformers to break from the Roman Catholic Church. Equal clarity and courage are required of us now.

In a time of cultural conflict, the enemy of our enemy may well be our friend. But, with eternity in view and the gospel at stake, the enemy of our enemy must not be confused as a friend to the gospel of Jesus Christ. ■

**THEOLOGICAL
LIBERALISM DOES
ITS BEST TO MAKE
PEACE WITH
THE ENEMIES OF
THE CHURCH,
BUT FAITHFUL
CHRISTIANS HAVE
NO WAY TO ESCAPE
THE BATTLES.**

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Above All, Know God

The world-changing purpose behind Ligonier Ministries

BY CHRIS LARSON

D ID YOU KNOW that reading *Tabletalk* magazine could be considered an act of cultural subversion? The very existence of a magazine dedicated to the propagation of the historic Christian faith is countercultural. This is because darkness permeates our culture. Many seem to be more spiritual than ever, but their hearts are far from God and the truth of His Word.

That is why Ligonier Ministries' founder, Dr. R.C. Sproul, has focused our work in an effort to flood the culture with knowledgeable and articulate Christians. Just as you see with this issue of *Tabletalk* magazine, everything we do as a ministry has the aim of equipping growing Christians whose lives are being transformed by the gospel. Together, in support of the local church, we are "God's fellow workers" (1 Cor. 3:9).

Our vision is to propagate biblical Christianity throughout the world and see it flourish in the church. We believe that the best and most biblical expression of Christianity is found in the emphases coming out of the Protestant Reformation. The world-shaping impact of Reformed theology includes a desire for revival but goes far beyond it. We want to see hearts and wills conquered so that Christians are equipped to effect change in every sphere.

WHAT DO WE DO?

Ligonier Ministries exists to proclaim, teach, and defend the holiness of God to as many people as possible. God's holiness is essential to understanding His character. When we



rightly know the character of our Creator, we know who we are as creatures. To that end, our outreach is manifold and worldwide in scope. With Dr. Sproul as our founding and primary teacher, we are a teaching fellowship of gifted theologians, pastors, and scholars who teach through *Renewing Your Mind* broadcasts, the *Reformation Study Bible*, *Tabletalk* magazine, books through the Reformation Trust Publishing division, and hundreds of short teaching series. We also offer an undergraduate degree program through Reformation Bible College and a Doctor of Ministry program for pastors. In addition, Ligonier hosts national and regional conferences, provides an online learning community through Ligonier Connect, streams twenty-four-hour Christian Internet radio through RefNet, offers multiple translation efforts in many countries, and makes available more than eight thousand unique educational resources online at Ligonier.org.

HOW DID WE GET STARTED?

Dr. Sproul founded Ligonier Ministries in 1971 in a small town called Ligonier in western Pennsylvania. (Dr. Sproul was born and raised in the Pittsburgh area, so it was natural for him to begin his public ministry there.) What was once a small study center has now grown into an international organization serving the global church from our campus near Orlando, Fla. Our methodology is straightforward: faithfully teach the Word of Christ so that His people may abide in Him and grow in fruitful service. Dr. Sproul explains that "it is the teaching of Christ that makes His disciples blossom and bloom, producing fruit in their season."

WHAT'S NEXT FOR LIGONIER MINISTRIES?

Look at Isaiah 6. The Lord reveals Himself to Isaiah and, for the first time in his life, Isaiah knows who Isaiah is. To what end? So that Isaiah would then proclaim the great and awesome name of God Most High to his generation. We are not redeemed so that we hoard the truth and bury our treasure. Rather, we are saved to spend—to spend our lives for the sake of God and His purposes in this world. Once we bow the knee to the Lord Jesus Christ, repent, and flee to Him as our only righteousness, we are propelled back into the world, back to proclaim His holiness to as many people as possible. Our greatest encouragement is when we meet people whom our Lord has reached with His truth and hear how it is being put into practice in their lives.

This is why the mission of Ligonier endures: just as the fundamental problem of the sinfulness of humanity endures, God's Word endures, ever relevant, ever piercing to the root of our deepest need. Our prayer is that Ligonier, through our many outreaches, would be used by the Holy Spirit to equip you and generations to come to know the God of the Bible and, by His grace, change the world.



**WE ARE SAVED TO SPEND
OUR LIVES FOR THE
SAKE OF GOD AND HIS
PURPOSES IN THE WORLD.**



Setting a Course for Faithfulness

AN INTERVIEW WITH STEPHEN J. NICHOLS

TT: What are your responsibilities in your role as president of Reformation Bible College and chief academic officer for Ligonier Ministries?

SN: Under the supervision and direction of the board of directors, the president of Reformation Bible College governs all aspects of the college from the staff and faculty to the students and curriculum. I am not alone in this, as I work alongside Dr. John W. Tweeddale, our academic dean.

Ligonier is primarily a teaching ministry that delivers content in a variety of ways. As chief academic officer, I work with Chris Larson, Ligonier's president, in maintaining the theological emphasis and voice of Ligonier, which has proven beneficial to so many in the church over these last four decades. In both of these positions, I report directly to Dr. R.C. Sproul.

It is all rather humbling. Ultimately, the responsibility of both positions is to maintain theological fidelity. History abounds with tragic examples of ministries and colleges losing their moorings. Above all, institutions need God's grace to stay true to Him, and they also need to be purposeful and committed.

Dr. Sproul has cast the vision and set the course. These two roles that I fill, along with many other roles at Ligonier and RBC where others serve, are in place so that the next generation, and generations to come, may grow in their knowledge of God—to increase their zeal to serve God, and to glorify and enjoy God forever.

TT: What excites you most about the ministry of RBC?

SN: It would have to be both the potential of the faculty and the potential of the students. Gathered in Sanford, Fla., is a world-class collection of scholars who are committed to the mission of Ligonier Ministries, RBC, and the church. Augustine once said that a good teacher is one who loves the subject, loves the students, and, above all, loves God. That is the RBC faculty, and they will be a substantial resource for the church for years to come. Then there are the students. They are taught the full range of biblical studies, church history, philosophy, and apologetics. On top of that, RBC has a great works curriculum, affording students the opportunity to engage classic texts and the history of ideas from the early Greeks to the present day. The curricu-

lum is built upon and aims at one thing: the knowledge of God. We exist to teach students theology. And they are taught by godly professors who love their subjects and are called to make disciples of their students. When you consider all of this, you can't help but get excited about the potential of RBC. There is an urgent need for this kind of education and for this unique college.

TT: What would you like to see RBC accomplish over the next ten years? Twenty years? Fifty years?

SN: First and foremost would be faithfulness—faithfulness as an institution to the Reformed faith and to the particular theological emphases that have marked Ligonier Ministries since its inception forty years ago. That faithfulness also has to do with our students. They come to us, study with us, and eventually graduate. Commencement is not an end, however, but a beginning of a life of ministry, of work and vocation, and of family. What will be said of RBC students at the end of their life's journey? If the answer is faithfulness, then RBC will have been used by God in their lives to accom-

plish something of lasting significance and of true substance.

Second is fruitfulness. The goal for RBC is not to be big, but to be influential. We want RBC men and women to know and love

God, to be articulate and persuasive, and to contend for truth, goodness, and beauty.

TT: Why are you concerned with defending the doctrine of Scripture's inerrancy in this day and age?

SN: Defending inerrancy is necessary precisely because it is being challenged and even jettisoned by many who would claim to be evangelicals. The doctrine of inerrancy reminds us that the Bible is God's authoritative and trustworthy Word to us. My concern is with alternative views, and especially with the consequences of those alternatives. If you do not hold to the full inerrancy of Scripture, what do you have? Essentially, you have limited inerrancy. That has the Bible submitting to us—to our judgment. That has it all topsy-turvy. The doctrine of Scripture is the first domino, so to speak. If it falls in the wrong direction, the whole chain of dominoes falls in the wrong direction.



DR. STEPHEN J. NICHOLS

is president of Reformation Bible College, chief academic officer of Ligonier Ministries, and a Ligonier teaching fellow. He also serves as adjunct professor for Reformed Theological Seminary and is a visiting lecturer at Westminster Theological Seminary's program at the John Owen Centre in London. He has written many books, including Welcome to the Story and Confidence in God, and volumes in the Guided Tour series on Jonathan Edwards, Martin Luther, and J. Gresham Machen. He is coeditor with Dr. R.C. Sproul of The Legacy of Luther and coeditor of Crossway's Theologians on the Christian Life series. He hosts the weekly podcast 5 Minutes in Church History.



TT: Why is it important to express and defend a biblical Christology?

SN: Christology encompasses the person and work of Christ. As for His person, we must confess the God-man, the hypostatic union of the divine nature and the human nature in one person. As for Christ's work, we must confess His sinless life, His perfect obedience, His atoning death as a substitute in our place, His burial, His resurrection, and His ascension to the Father's right hand. Sadly, many of these doctrines are also being challenged and jettisoned today. Consider this: Can we have the gospel without a biblical Christology? The answer, of course, is no. And without the gospel, we cease to be the church. We are called to proclaim the gospel and live out its ramifications. The heart and soul of the gospel is a biblical Christology. We must confess it, teach it, and defend it. This is why we produced *The Word Made Flesh: The Ligonier Statement on Christology*. We must confess and contend for a biblical Christology.

TT: Several of your writings focus on Jonathan Edwards. Why do you return to this early American preacher and theologian so often?

SN: I never find the time I spend with Edwards to be wasted time. I come away from



A Time for Confidence

BY STEPHEN J. NICHOLS

As members of a society that is quickly abandoning its Christian past, followers of Christ often feel disoriented or even frightened. When human leaders and political advocates fail us, doubts arise and the road to compromise beckons. In this book, Dr. Stephen J. Nichols points to the almighty God as the source and ground of our confidence. Though the whole world may shake around us, His kingdom is unshakable. This is a time for confidence.

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reading him being challenged and with new ways of thinking about and living the Christian life. Just the other day, I was looking at the letter Sarah Edwards, his wife, wrote to their daughter after Jonathan died. She said, "What shall I say? A holy and good God has covered us with a dark cloud." She clings to God's holiness and goodness in a time of turmoil and suffering. Sarah's reaction reflects what her husband lived, taught, and wrote. I go back to Edwards because I so need that perspective.

TT: What are two major lessons that American Christians need to learn from Christians who lived in centuries past?

SN: Track down a copy of Augustine's *Confessions*. You will see that the first word in Latin is *magnus*. God is great. He is transcendent, infinitely above and over His creation. The corollary is that we are not. We are finite. I don't think we reflexively think of God as great and of ourselves as small. But we must.

The second major lesson concerns suffering. The vast majority of voices from the past offer a far different perspective than we do on suffering. Perhaps it's due to our living in the "entitlement age," or due to our sense of overcoming so many diseases and ailments that once plagued previous generations. Whatever the reason, we see suffering as abnormal

and to be avoided. What does Paul mean by participating in the fellowship of Christ's sufferings? We learn more about what that means when we look to the past than when we confine ourselves to the present.

TT: In what major ways has American culture distorted our understanding of Jesus?

SN: American culture's distorting our understanding of Jesus offers a clear case where culture rushes in to fill the vacuum left when we disdain tradition. The Nicene and Chalcedonian creeds mark out helpful boundaries regarding the person of Christ. The Reformers mark out helpful boundaries for thinking of Christ's work. When we neglect these resources, we are overly influenced by culture. In America's Victorian age, Jesus was "feminized." He was seen exclusively as meek and mild. Even the images of this era portray Jesus as feminine. In our day, Jesus has taken on any number of personae. I've seen images of Him in a boxing ring with gloves on, ready to fight the devil.

Scripture presents Jesus as a rather complex person. We can distort that image, constructing a Jesus who looks like us, and is there simply to affirm us. The creeds and the Reformation *solae* can go a long way in helping us think clearly and biblically about Jesus.

TT: Name a few inappropriate ways to read church history.

SN: I can name three. The first would be not to read it. Why cut yourself off from the

riches of the past? The second concerns reading history with judgmental and dismissive attitudes. We can easily do this because we tend to think so highly of our own age, and we tend to be unaware of our own blind spots. The counter is to read church history with humility, not hubris. Third, we need to avoid "hagiography." Our church history figures don't need halos. The Scripture writers show the faults and flaws of the

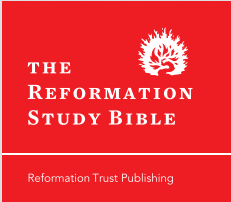
biblical figures. There is only one who ranks as the true hero: Christ. We can be so thankful for leaders from church history who so clearly and persuasively point us to Christ. But we must ultimately look to the One to whom they are pointing and not to them.

TT: How can Christians have confidence in God in this day and age?

SN: When Rome collapsed in the early 400s, the great scholar Jerome

declared the world to be in ruins, went into a cave outside of Bethlehem, and waited to die. Conversely, Augustine wrote the classic text *The City of God*. Augustine reminds us that, while empires come and go, God's kingdom is unshakable. What Augustine said then is what we need now. We can have confidence in God because His Word is true and sure, because His ways are perfect and good, and because He sovereignly reigns over His world. We live in challenging and confusing times that can throw us off balance. But we do not go crawling into a cave. Instead, with confidence and conviction, we remember our unchanging God and we trust in His steadfast love and faithfulness.

OUR CHURCH HISTORY FIGURES DON'T NEED HALOS. THE SCRIPTURE WRITERS SHOW THE FAULTS AND FLAWS OF THE BIBLICAL FIGURES. THERE IS ONLY ONE WHO RANKS AS THE TRUE HERO: CHRIST.



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