

Growing & Changing in Christ
DRAFT

MATTHEW BLACK

GROWING
AND
CHANGING IN
CHRIST

The Myth of the Carnal Christian

Growing & Changing in Christ: the myth of the carnal Christian
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To my wife Jill Marie

The wisest choice I ever made was to marry you. I'm unworthy to have you by my side in our journey of growing and changing in Christ.

My desire in writing this book is best expressed by
J. C. Ryle:

I do not set up myself to be better than other people, and if anyone asks, "What are you, that you write in this way?" I answer, "I am a very poor creature indeed."

But I say that I cannot read the Bible without desiring to see many believers more spiritual, more holy, more single-eyed, more heavenly-minded, more whole-hearted than they are in the nineteenth century.

I want to see among believers more of a pilgrim spirit, a more decided separation from the world, a conversation more evidently in heaven, a closer walk with God, and therefore I have written as I have.¹

¹ John Charles Ryle. *Holiness*. (London: James Clarke, 1952), 48.

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Preface

An Introduction to the Controversy

The well known British pastor and evangelist of the last century, Leonard Ravenhill said, “There’s only one proof of the Holy Ghost in your life and that’s a holy life”. He said, “Get rid of this bunkum about the ‘carnal Christian’. Forget it! If you're carnal, you’re not saved.”²

Several years ago we had a group come to our church to share their testimonies, sing, and preach. Both the preaching

² Leonard Ravenhill. *Holiness Quotes for the Remnant* (Life and Liberty Ministries), Available at: <http://www.lifeandlibertyministries.com>.

and the testimonies disturbed me and awakened me to a great confusion that has seeped into our churches. During the testimonies each young person said that they were converted usually at a young age, but that they lived a life of sin for years and years, and then finally came back to the Lord. The preaching had a similar theme. Though the words were not said, I recognized the teaching immediately as the so-called “carnal Christian” doctrine.

The Bible never teaches that a person can be a true Christian and live in continuous carnality, practicing sin all the days of his life. Christians agree on this on the surface, but there is this false teaching out there that makes provision for this very thing taking place in our churches. The teaching goes like this: when we see someone who is living a life characterized by sin and persistent backsliding but who professes to be a Christian, we say, certainly they are Christians, they are simply carnal. We do not even realize it, but we are minimizing sin and inoculating people who think they are Christians, who may indeed be lost. You may not even be familiar with the teaching formally, but its pattern of thought is a common error in many of the churches today, and it needs to be corrected.

Why Say Anything At All?

While I regret having had this group at our church, I know in the end it will work out for our church’s eternal good. For one thing, when anyone comes and teaches wrongly from the Bible, it gives the pastor an opportunity to correct them. Pastors are to guard sound doctrine, to “*reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching*” (2 Timothy 4:2). This book is a result of their coming. I have written it in order to expand the influence of the Bible doctrine of sanctification,

which I believe is being neglected in many American churches. I have been challenged by the words of John Newton (author of the hymn “Amazing Grace”), in his first sermon as a pastor to his new congregation, that the man of God should never neglect any area of doctrine:

The Bible is the grand repository of the truths that it will be the business and the pleasure of my life to set before you. It is the complete system of divine truth to which nothing can be added and from which nothing can be taken with impunity. Every attempt to disguise or soften any branch of this truth in order to accommodate it to the prevailing taste around us either to avoid the displeasure or court the favor of our fellow mortals must be an affront to the majesty of God and an act of treachery to men. My conscience bears me witness that I mean to speak the truth among you.³

Today, many who call themselves pastors could care less about a careful handling of Bible doctrine. They are like the lazy watchmen of Isaiah. A pastor is called to be an astute and careful watchman over his flock. Listen to what Isaiah said about the slothful pastors of his day in Isaiah 56:10-11:

His watchmen are blind; they are all without knowledge; they are all silent dogs; they cannot bark, dreaming, lying down, loving to slumber. The dogs have a mighty appetite; they never have enough. But they are shepherds who have no understanding; they have all turned to their own way, each to his own gain, one and all.

Do you hear what God calls pastors who do not feed their sheep? The Lord says they are blind, all ignorant, all silent dogs

³ Jonathan Aitken. *John Newton: From Disgrace to Amazing Grace* (Wheaton, IL: Good News Publishers, 2007), 272.

that cannot bark, greedy dogs, and shepherds that cannot understand. Every pastor will give an account for each person in his fold. May we not be lazy dogs! A.W. Tozer spoke of the need for pastors to speak out against the onslaught of false teaching that comes against the church:

Could it be that too many of God's true children, and especially the preachers, are sinning against God by guilty silence?...I for one am waiting to hear the loud voices of the prophets and reformers sounding once more over a sluggish and drowsy church. They'll pay a price for their boldness, but the results will be worth it. ⁴

May the Lord grant every pastor boldness and the willingness to pay the price.

To Say Nothing is to Give Tacit Approval of Error

I had a choice when this error crossed our church's pulpit. I could have said nothing. Edmund Burke, the eighteenth century Irish statesman and philosopher is attributed as saying, "evil prevails when good men do nothing".⁵ To say nothing is to give tacit approval of error. Martin Luther said:

If I profess with the loudest voice and clearest exposition every portion of the truth of God except precisely that point which

⁴A.W. Tozer. *God Tells the Man Who Cares* (Camp Hill, PA: WingSpread, 1992), 162.

⁵ This idea came from Burke's book *Thoughts on the Cause of Present Discontents* written in 1770 where he said, "When bad men combine, the good must associate; else they will fall one by one, an unpitied sacrifice in a contemptible struggle." This thought was merged into Sergei Bondarchuk's Soviet film version of Tolstoy's book "War and Peace", in which the narrator declares "All that is necessary for evil to triumph is for good men to do nothing". The quote itself is an English translation from Bondarchuk's film.

the world and the devil are at that moment attacking, then I am not confessing Christ, however boldly I may be professing Him. Where the battle rages, there the loyalty of the soldier is proved; and to be steady on all the battlefield besides is merely flight and disgrace if he flinches at that point [most under attack].⁶

In other words, Satan will destroy a church, not where the lines of soldiers are thickest, but where there is an opening. I cannot leave an opening in our church or in any churches where I can make a difference. Luther's motto was "Peace if possible, truth at all costs".⁷ Adrian Rodgers said: "It is better to be divided by truth than to be united in error. It is better to speak the truth that hurts and heals, than falsehood that comforts and then kills."⁸

Definition

Let me define what I mean when I say the "carnal Christian" doctrine or teaching. This doctrine teaches that there are two classes of Christians: spiritual and carnal. This theory holds that a person who is a new creation in Christ can practice sin as a lifestyle, and though living in continual sin, he still has the hope of heaven. He has accepted Christ as Savior and may or may not one day accept Him as Lord. These professors are con-

⁶ Martin Luther. *Luther's Works: Weimar Edition, Volume 3* (Briefwechsel [Correspondence]), 81ff.

⁷ Martin Luther as quoted in *Words to Live By* (Ann Arbor, MI: Hagopian Institute, nd), 80.

⁸ Pastor Adrian Rodgers, excerpts from talk, National Religious Broadcasters Convention, 1996

sidered Christians who are carnal, not yet having come to a point of surrender.⁹ R.C. Sproul describes it this way:

There is a widespread notion within evangelical Christianity that there are two distinctive types of Christians. There is the carnal Christian and the spiritual Christian. The carnal Christian is a believer who does not have Christ on the throne of his life and thereby lives a pattern of constant disobedience. Then there is the “Spirit-filled” Christian whose life is characterized by a life of obedience and spiritual devotion. Here Christ reigns on the throne of the Christian life.¹⁰

He goes on to say:

Here the carnal Christian is one who is said to believe in Christ but lives a life of consistent carnality, giving no evidence of the fruit of the Spirit. This represents a fatal contradiction in terms. Such a person may not be called a carnal Christian. He must be considered a carnal non-Christian. If a person manifests a life of pure and consistent carnality, he is no Christian. He has not the Spirit of Christ living in him. It is a flat impossibility to be born of the Spirit and have no change in one’s life. A Christian with no fruit is simply not a Christian. Antinomianism is the spirit of lawlessness that reigns in the children of disobedience. The “faith” of a carnal Christian is no faith. It cannot justify the ungodly. It cannot be pleasing to God.¹¹

Sadly, this doctrine is taught in our churches and holds most sway among those who have made professions of faith as children. Little or no meaningful growth takes place in their

⁹ A.W. Tozer speaks more on the false idea that Jesus Christ can be our Saviour but not our Lord in his book *I Call It Heresy!* (Harrisburg, PA.: Christian Publications, 1974). I cover this in chapter 11 of this book.

¹⁰R.C. Sproul. *Pleasing God* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1994), 152.

¹¹*Ibid.*, 153.

life, but because they asked the Lord to save them on one occasion, they are considered a true and genuine believer in Christ.

The History of this Teaching

The carnal Christian doctrine of today is just a form of an old heresy called “antinomianism”. Epistemologically, “Anti” means “no” or “against” and “nomian” means “law”.¹² In other words, antinomianism is the teaching that a Christian may practice a lawless life without the rule of Christ in his heart.

This is actually not a new controversy. H. A. Ironside, former pastor of the Moody Church of Chicago, fought against it in his day when he said:

...there are not wanting professed preachers of grace who, like the antinomians of old, decry the necessity of repentance... Loudly declaring they are justified by faith alone, they fail to remember that *‘faith without works is dead’*.¹³

In recent days, this teaching was revived with the Scofield Study Bible. According to Ernest Reisinger:

One reason why [the carnal Christian doctrine] is so widespread is that it has been popularized for many years in the notes of the Scofield Reference Bible. A statement from these notes will indicate the precise nature of the teaching: “Paul divides men into three classes: ‘Natural’ i.e. the Adamic Man, unrenewed through the new birth; ‘Spiritual’ i.e. the renewed man as Spirit-filled and walking in the Spirit in full communion with God; ‘Carnal’, ‘fleshly’, i.e. the renewed man

¹²*Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*. Eleventh ed. (Springfield, Mass: Merriam-Webster, Inc., 2003), antinomianism.

¹³ Harry A. Ironside. *Except Ye Repent* (New York: American Tract Society, 1937), 3.

who, walking 'after the flesh', remains a babe in Christ" (Scofield Reference Bible, pp. 1213, 1214).¹⁴

John MacArthur confirms this. He further explains how the doctrine's revival comes out of classic dispensational thinking:

The doctrine apparently stemmed from Chafer's misguided attempts to develop a uniquely dispensationalist soteriology. Chafer (together with other early dispensationalists, including C. I. Scofield) was so zealous to eliminate every vestige of law from the dispensation of grace that he embraced a kind of antinomianism.¹⁵

Charles Ryrie is also a proponent of the carnal Christian doctrine. He said, referring to 1 Corinthians 3:

Paul can only mean that these Carnal Christians lived like unsaved men. That clarifies why the word Carnal can label both unbelievers and believers, simply because the lifestyles of both are the same.¹⁶

The once well-known Baptist preacher R. B. Thieme frames the argument in the way most of us have heard it from the pulpit.

The behavior pattern of a carnal Christian cannot be distinguished from that of an unbeliever 1 Corinthians 3:3. As far as God's Word is concerned you may act like an unbeliever; but if you have believed in Christ, you are still a believer—a believer in the status quo carnality—out of fellowship. A

¹⁴ Ernest Reisinger. *The Carnal Christian: What Should We Think of the Carnal Christian?* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1991), 7.

¹⁵ John MacArthur. *A 15-Year Retrospective on the Lordship Controversy*. An article available on the *Grace to You* web site: <http://www.gty.org/Resources/articles/2263>.

¹⁶ Charles Ryrie. *So Great Salvation* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1989), 62.

BELIEVER OUT OF FELLOWSHIP ACTS LIKE AN UNBELIEVER. In fact he is sometime worse.¹⁷

Scofield, Chafer, Ryrie and Thieme assure us that they got this idea from a passage in 1 Corinthians 3:1-4. Let's look at what Paul says there.

A Helpful Study of 1 Corinthians 3

And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual people but as to carnal, as to babes in Christ. I fed you with milk and not with solid food; for until now you were not able to receive it, and even now you are still not able; for you are still carnal. For where there are envy, strife, and divisions among you, are you not carnal and behaving like mere men? For when one says, "I am of Paul," and another, "I am of Apollos," are you not carnal? (1 Corinthians 3:1-4, NKJV).

Taken out of context, Scofield and the others might seem to be right. But when looking at the entire letter that Paul wrote, we find that in this passage, Paul was rebuking the church as a whole for an *area* of carnality in their lives. They needed to learn about how to resolve personal conflicts. They were acting as unregenerate people in an area of their lives. As long as they held on to the iniquity of jealousy and envying that Paul points out, they could not be taught in the deeper things of the Lord. Yet they were not altogether without the evidences of the Spirit. Paul was not saying that they were living without spiritual fruit in their lives. In chapter 1 Paul talked about how they were liv-

¹⁷ Robert Thieme, *The Prodigal Son* (Houston: R.B. Thieme, Jr. Bible Ministries, 1967), 7-8 [emphasis by Thieme].

ing lives that were focused on Jesus' coming, and Paul gave thanks to God for them in verses 4-8 (NKJV)

I thank my God always concerning you for the grace of God which was given to you by Christ Jesus, that you were enriched in everything by Him in all utterance and all knowledge, even as the testimony of Christ was confirmed in you, so that you come short in no gift, eagerly waiting for the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ, who will also confirm you to the end, that you may be blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Paul established that they were growing in holiness before his rebuke later in chapter 1 and in chapter 3. His commendation here is not spiritual fluff in order to cushion his coming rebuke. This is an accurate assessment of their spiritual growth as recorded in inspired Scripture. In the above verses, Paul gives evidence of the regenerate state of their hearts by testifying of their holiness. In “*everything*’ they were “*enriched by Him [Christ]*”—in their words (“*utterance*”), thoughts (“*knowledge*”), and life (“*the testimony of Christ was confirmed in [them]*”). Paul affirms that the Lord Jesus Christ who saved them would “*also confirm [them] to the end*” (verse 8). In other words, the evidence that Christ had truly changed their hearts was that they would persevere in these fruits of holiness until the last day of their lives. Paul is not dividing the people into three classes, natural, carnal, and spiritual, but teaching that truly saved people will grow persistently and progressively in holiness. Actually in chapter 2 Paul names only two types of people: the natural man who does not receive the things of God’s Spirit (1 Corinthians 2:14 NKJV), and those who are indwelt by the Spirit, who do. Paul goes to great length to explain how they have the Spirit of God in them. In chapter 2 and verse

10, Paul says God has revealed the “*deep things*” of God’s Spirit to them. Paul shows further spiritual fruit, how they were being taught by the Holy Spirit Himself (verse 13). He says in verse 14 that the natural or unsaved person could not understand the things of the Spirit, but Corinthian believers were not like that. Paul says to them: “*we have the mind of Christ*” (verse 16, NKJV).

What is the point? Paul is *not* saying that their lives were characterized by carnality as a whole. These were not people living in sin and rebellion to God who had professed salvation but had no spiritual fruit. They were people with new hearts who were producing authentic spiritual fruit, but like all believers do at times, they were struggling with an area or two of their lives, and it was affecting the whole church in this instance. They needed to progress in their sanctification.

Having shown briefly that this passage does not teach another class of believers, I want to show you that the Word of God refutes the carnal Christian doctrine throughout. As we look at the span of the Bible, the message is that those who are saved are *new* creations. They have a new heart and a new nature, and they grow and change to be like Christ. If a professing believer has no measure of fruit in his life, he is not a Christian no matter what religious rituals he has taken part in (sinner’s prayer, an emotional decision at an altar call, baptism, church membership, etc.).

Voices From the Past

This is not only my conclusion, but it is the opinion of the spectrum of God’s servants in the history of the Lord’s church. Throughout the span of church history, the Lord’s servants

have refuted the carnal Christian doctrine by promoting the inevitability of a changed life once regeneration has taken place.

William Tyndale (1494-1536), martyr and translator of the Bible into the modern English language, was resolute that true faith is always followed by the fruit of good works. In his prologue to Paul's Epistle to the Romans, he gives this commentary about what a living faith looks like:

Faith is then a lively and steadfast trust in the favour of God, wherewith we commit ourselves altogether unto God, and that trust is so surely grounded and sticketh so fast in our hearts, that a man would not once doubt of it, though he should die a thousand times therefore. And such trust wrought by the Holy Ghost through faith, maketh a man glad, lusty, cheerful and true-hearted unto God and to all creatures. By the means whereof, willingly and without compulsion he is glad and ready to do good to every man, to do service to every man, to suffer all things, that God may be loved and praised, which hath given him such grace: so that it is impossible to separate good works from faith, even as it is impossible to separate heat and burning from fire.¹⁸

Menno Simons (1496-1561), one of the few Anabaptist leaders whose Gospel fruit endures today, contended that according to the Word of God, the church could never be a collection of carnal sinners, even if they claimed to know Christ. Listen to his wise words:

...you shall learn and know from the word of God that the holy, Christian church is no collection of unbelievers, carnal or willful sinners; notwithstanding they falsely claim to be of Christ Jesus, and think themselves to be the true, Christian

¹⁸ William Tyndale. "Prologue to the Book of Romans," *New Testament* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996, reprint—originally published in 1534), 212-213.

church. No, kind readers, no. They are not all Abraham's seed who are born of Abraham, "But the children of the promise are counted for the seed," Rom. 9:8. Thus, also, the holy, Christian church must be a spiritual seed, an assembly of the righteous, and a community of the saints; which church is begotten of God, of the living seed of the divine word, and not of the teachings, institutions, and fictions of man. Yea, they are those who are regenerated, renewed and converted; who hear, believe, and fulfill all the commandments and will of God; who "have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts;" who "are all one in Christ Jesus." "Joint heirs with Christ," and heavenly and spiritually minded with him, Gal. 5:24; 3:28; Rom. 8:17. These are the holy, Christian church, the community of God, the body and the bride of Christ, whom he hath trusted, cleansed and sanctified; but "they that are in the flesh cannot please God." This holy, Christian church has a spiritual Prince over her who rules her with the unbroken rod of his divine word; a Master, or Teacher who teaches the commandments of eternal life; and a Bridegroom whose voice she is ever ready to hear, that is, Christ Jesus, 1 Cor. 6:11; Rom. 8:8; Ps. 2:9; Jn. 6:68; 3:29.¹⁹

John Bunyan (1628-1688), who spent twelve years total in the Bedford prison for the faith, though not addressing it directly, refuted this false teaching, saying this:

...a life of holiness and godliness in this world doth so inseparably follow a principle of faith, that it is both monstrous and ridiculous to suppose the contrary. What, shall not he that hath life have motion! (Galatians 2:20). He that hath by faith received the Spirit of holiness, shall not he be holy? (Galatians

¹⁹ Menno Simons. *The Complete Writings of Menno Simons* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1966), 234.

3:2), and he that is called to glory and virtue, shall not he add to his faith virtue? (2 Peter 1:4-5).²⁰

Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758), the American philosopher, theologian, and preacher during the Great Awakening wrote: Scripture plainly teaches, that practice is the best evidence of the sincerity of professing Christians; so reason teaches the same thing. Reason shows, that men's deeds are better and more faithful interpreters of their minds, than their words. The common sense of all mankind, through all ages and nations, teaches them to judge of men's hearts chiefly by their practice... Reason says the same that Christ said, in John 14:21. "He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me." Thus if we see a man, who in the course of his life seems to follow and imitate Christ...reason teaches, that this is an evidence of love to Christ, more to be depended on, than if a man only *says* he has love to him...when it may be there appears but little imitation of Christ in his behaviour.²¹

George Whitefield (1714-1770), the great preacher and revivalist of Britain and the American colonies wrote about the carnal Christian teaching (which he calls "antinomian principles") in his journal dated August 6, 1739:

Had a conference after sermon with one, who I fear with some others, maintained antinomian principles. From such, may all that know them turn away; for though, (to use the words of our Church Article) good works, which are the fruits of faith, cannot put away our sins, or endure the severity of God's judgment (that is, cannot justify us), yet they follow after

²⁰ John Bunyan. *Christian Behavior* (Pensacola, FL: Mount Zion Chapel Library, n.d.), 8.

²¹ Jonathan Edwards: *The Works of Jonathan Edwards, Volume 1* (Bellingham, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 2008), 321.

justification, and do spring out necessarily of a true and lively faith, insomuch that by them a lively faith may be as evidently known as a tree discerned by the fruit.²²

Listen to the words of Charles Haddon Spurgeon (1834-1892). His words are searing, but so necessary in the day we live:

If your life is unholy, then your heart is unchanged, and you are an unsaved person. The Savior will sanctify His people, renew them, give them a hatred of sin, and a love of holiness. The grace that does not make a man better than others is a worthless counterfeit. Christ saves His people, not *in* their sins, but *from* their sins. Without holiness, no man shall see the Lord.²³

Truly, this entire book could be filled with quotes from the entire span of church history of the central figures God used to trumpet His Gospel. From Clement, Augustine, Aquinas, and à Kempis to Martin Luther, Tyndale, the Puritans, Wesley, Whitefield, Spurgeon, Tozer, and Ravenhill, the great preachers and theologians of the past held that a true and living faith always produces the fruits of holiness in the life. Indeed I cannot think of one that held to anything resembling the carnal Christian doctrine.

My Hope for this Book

I have a twofold aim for this writing. My first aim is to give great hope and encouragement to Christians who do love the

²² George Whitefield. *Journals* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1960), 323-24.

²³ Charles Spurgeon. *Evening by Evening* (New Kensington, PA: Whitaker House, 1984), 41.

Lord and are battling against the flesh every day. You “*hating even the garment stained by the flesh.*” (Jude 23). The deepest desire in your heart of hearts is to “*present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness.*” (Romans 6:13). You are battling against sin in your life and “have put off the old self with its practices” (Colossians 3:9). You have had an inward change of nature, yet you often get tired and weary in your battle against sin. You are looking forward to the day of redemption, when sin shall be no more!

My second aim is to make those in carnal ease and false assurance uncomfortable and to warn them of the wrath to come. I hope that any one reading this book who loves and delights in practicing sin, will understand that where there is no inward battle against sin and submission to God’s will, there is no standing with God (see Matthew 7:21 and following). You may profess to know Christ, but Christ will not profess to know you on the Day of accounting.

Errors to Avoid

Before we begin, I want to clearly lay the path we are going to travel. While we are trying to avoid giving comfort to those who make a profession of faith in Christ and yet have no fruit to prove that they are Christians, we also want to avoid the error of perfectionism as well as legalism.

The Error of Sinless Perfectionism

Christians do sin. “*If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us*” (1 John 1:8). Christians may sin in thought, word, and deed. That is why there are

so many calls in Scripture for Christians to avoid sinning. But a Christian is not a slave to sin and does not delight in sin in his heart of hearts. He battles and struggles against it constantly. A Christian cannot continue in sin! Paul says, “*For sin will have no dominion over you...having been set free from sin, [you] have become slaves of righteousness*” (Romans 6:14, 18). The Christian will be progressively sanctified in this life. We will cover more of this in later chapters, but we want to avoid the error of sinless perfectionism. A Christian is quite aware of his sins, and he hates them and is constantly mortifying them and waging war against the deceitful lusts of his old nature. The believer has been “*made free indeed*” by the Son—delivered from the *power* of sin (John 8:36). The new creature now has Christ as his new master. By contrast, the unbeliever is “*a slave to sin*” (John 8:34). Sin dominates his life. He “*drinks iniquity like water!*” (Job 15:16, NKJV).

The Error of Legalism

The other error that we must avoid is that of legalism. Jesus described the legalists when he warned in Matthew 15:8, “*This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me*”. Legalism makes the Gospel one of self-righteousness by creating outward standards to measure spirituality—like hair length, dress length, music standards, etc.²⁴ Any heathen can get a good haircut, dress modestly, and listen to sacred music (ask the members of the Mormon Tabernacle Choir). Any per-

²⁴ Legalism in the extreme adds human works of righteousness to the Gospel, such as the necessity of baptism or good works *plus* repentance and faith in Christ. A person lives holy because they are justified with a new nature; they do not live holy in order to be justified. The error of legalism is found in various groups professing to be Christian such as Roman Catholicism, Cambellites (i.e. Church of Christ, Disciples of Christ, or Christian Church), or Seventh Day Adventists.

son with an unchanged nature can recite a doctrinal statement or preach a Bible message. Good works will always come out of a changed nature, certainly. But good looking outward works can come out of anybody. God looks on the heart despite how good a person may look on the outside. Salvation is more than outward standards—it is a complete change of a person’s nature and affections. The love of the Lordship of Christ will be seen in a new heart burning with love and sacrificial humble service for others. The new heart treasures Christ above all things. Because of this, the measure of Christ’s righteousness will work out of the heart of the believer (Philippians 2:12-13). Superficial changes can be made by any heathen, cultist, or atheist on the planet. The righteousness of legalists is only as thick as their clothing and smarmy smile. We need to be clothed in the inner man with the righteousness of Jesus Christ in regeneration. We must seek nothing less than the new birth—a total transformation of heart.

So legalism and perfectionism are to be avoided. Man’s pride must be humbled, and Christ’s righteousness exalted. We reject self-righteous legalism as well as the error of perfectionism. But in this book, our cannons are aimed at another wretched heresy that damns souls to hell and gives false comfort to sinners. This carnal Christian false teaching needs to be exposed.

Clarifications

Before we do that, let me also make several Scriptural clarifications to some objections that may come.

Babes in Christ

First, I want to recognize that we were all once babes in Christ. Praise God for babies! But even babies in Christ show outward fruit of hunger and thirst for the Word of God. In babes, the heart has been reached, but sometimes there is not the strength of faith as in mature Christians. They are like Lazarus who has been inwardly raised from the dead, but he still has the grave clothes on. So yes, there are babies, but babes in Christ do not stay babies. There is a progression in sanctification. We are called to “*grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ*” (2 Peter 3:18). So though there are babes in Christ, God promises that they will not remain so.

Carnal Areas of Life

Second, I also want to recognize that the Bible teaches there is a sense in which a Christian may be said to be carnal in an area of his life. As Galatians 5:17 says, there are times when “*the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do*”. Yet sin is never the habit or practice of the Christian’s life.²⁵ So if by carnal one means there is an area where a Christian is losing the fight against the old man for a time—that is legitimate. A Christian may fall into sin, even grievously. But a Christian will always be brought out of that sin through God’s loving hand of chastening: “*For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives*” (Hebrews 12:6). “[F]or

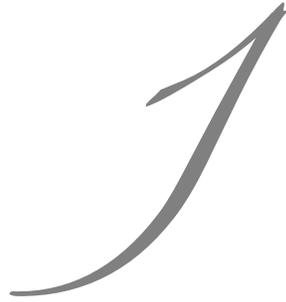
²⁵ For more biblical evidence of the Christians supernatural desire to practice righteousness, see chapter 12, specifically Mark #3 of a genuine Christian according to the Apostle John in his First Epistle of John.

the righteous falls seven times and rises again, but the wicked stumble in times of calamity” (Proverbs 24:16).

Different Rates of Progress in the Christian Life

Finally, we need to recognize that there are different speeds of progress in growth in the Christian’s life. Growth is not always at the same speed. There are many falls and times when a Christian grieves the Holy Spirit along the way. We cry out all along the way, *“Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?”* (Romans 7:24). And that is the whole point. A genuine Christian is constantly aware of his sin. He is constantly clinging to Christ as the only Savior and way of escape. The Christian knows 1 John 2:1 well, *“My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.”* A false Christian does not think his sin is that big a deal—he minimizes sin. He does not turn to Christ as his Advocate but seeks to excuse his sin and forget it. This is the distinction I am getting at.

With all that in mind, I want to demonstrate that there are not three classes of people: the lost, the saved, and the saved but carnal. God forbid. A person is either saved and has the fruit of genuine conversion in him with a new nature and some measure of holiness in his life, or he is lost.



All Saints are Predestined for Holiness



*“It is easier to change the decree of God than to have
a truly born again person not live in some measure of
holiness and spiritual fruit.”*



Those whom free grace chooses, free grace cleanses. We are not chosen because we are holy, but chosen to be holy: and being chosen, the purpose is no dead letter, but we are made to seek after holiness”.²⁶ With these words Charles Haddon Spurgeon trumpeted the Scriptures’ promise of progressive sanctification for every believer.

An ongoing life of carnality is an impossibility in the Christian life. Paul said that God would bring about a complete sanctification of believers including sanctifying our “*whole spirit and soul and body*”, and that all believers would “*be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.*” And then the Apostle certifies it with a divine promise: “*He who calls you is faithful; he will surely do it*” (1 Thessalonians 5:23-24). It must be so since the Scriptures teach that all those whom God has elected for salvation are also foreordained by His unchangeable decree to produce the fruits of holiness. We are “*elect...according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in the sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ* (1 Peter 1:1-2). We “*are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them*” (Ephesians 2:10). Simply put, it is easier to change the decree of God than to have a truly born again person not live in some measure of holiness and spiritual fruit over the course of his life.

Yet much popular preaching today does not insist the inevitability of holiness based on God’s decree. It is quite common to say that someone was saved—they prayed a prayer or they confessed that they were saved, trusting in

²⁶ Charles Spurgeon. *Exploring the Mind and Heart of the Prince of Preachers* (Oswego, IL: Fox River Press, 2005), 228.

Christ's work on the cross to save them. Yet after a while they fall away and go back to their former life. We are told that they have accepted Jesus Christ as Savior, but one day they need to accept him as Lord. Some eventually die in their sins. I have heard more than one preacher at a funeral give assurance to a grieving family that their departed loved one was in heaven despite his heathen living because earlier on he had "accepted Christ as Savior". I have heard preachers say that people like Elvis Presley and Dolly Parton were Christians notwithstanding their openly sinful lifestyle, simply because in their words they professed to know Christ. This is a misunderstanding of the work of God in salvation and what it results in. Christ asks the question, "*Why do you call me 'Lord, Lord,' and not do what I tell you?*" (Luke 6:46). In other words salvation always results in some measure of obedience for the believer.

A profession of conversion is not enough. Regeneration of the heart must actually occur. God's Spirit must take up residency in the human heart. Calling anything that stops short of the new birth "regeneration" is anti-Christian. The Bible teaches that all who are justified are regenerated and are thereby predestined to be sanctified. The new heart under the influence of the indwelling Spirit of God guarantees some measure of holy living and spiritual fruit.

Justification Inseparable from Sanctification



"If we are called into God's family He will be sure that we bear the family likeness."



Archibald Alexander Hodge of Princeton Seminary showed how sanctification always proceeds from justification:

If there was ever one who attempted to receive Christ with justification and not with sanctification, he missed it, thank God! He was no more justified than he was sanctified.²⁷

Certainly there are baby Christians, but even baby Christians are guaranteed to immediately manifest some measure of holiness as weak and immature as it may be. There are different levels of holiness in the life. We are all growing and changing at different rates, but for the believer there is always a pattern of progressive spiritual growth in the life that begins the moment regeneration occurs. Christians can and do struggle with carnality in their life on the way to maturity. The point is there is a battle. There is a difference in attitude toward sin in the Christian. A Christian longs to be holy. Why is that? God has ordained it to be so and secured their holiness by sealing their soul with the divine impression of the *Holy Spirit* (1 Corinthians 1:22; Ephesians 1:13-14). He has made sure that sanctification would occur through regeneration, which gives the person a new nature that longs for holiness. He made certain that holiness would occur by putting His Spirit inside of believers to “*cause*” them to walk in holiness and obedience (Ezekiel 36:27; cf. Ezekiel 11:19-20).

The Word of God directly refutes the so-called “carnal Christian” teaching in numerous places which we will see in later chapters. Yet the most compelling and undeniable

²⁷ Archibald Alexander Hodge. *Popular Lectures on Theological Themes* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1887), 358-359.

guarantee of holiness for every Christian is God's decree that all Christians will be conformed to the image of Christ progressively in this life (Romans 8:29). The Scriptures teach that all whom God has foreordained for salvation are also foreordained by God's unchangeable decree to produce the fruits of holiness. In other words, it is impossible for a person who has been called by God to salvation to *not* have a measure of spiritual fruit in his life. Let us see this in the spectrum of New Testament passages.

The Teaching of Ephesians

Paul teaches in Ephesians that all Christians are *foreordained* for good works. God has decreed before the foundation of the world that all those the Father gives to the Son will walk in good works (John 6:37). Paul tells us why we have come to Jesus Christ in Ephesians 1:4 (NKJV), "*just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love*". No one can claim election and justification who does not practice a lifestyle that is "*holy and without blame before Him in love*". The life must reflect a fundamental and radical change of nature. Ephesians 2:10 likewise says that "*we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.*" As God's workmanship (literally His "masterpiece") we were created to be lights on a hill and candles on a candle stick reflecting the work of God in our heart. God created us anew so that we could shine as lights in this dark world. Shall those who do not shine have the right to bear the name Christian? Each day the genuine Christian has the assurance that God has from eternity past ordained his

righteous steps. “*The steps of a good man are ordered by the LORD, And He delights in his way*” (Psalm 37:23, NKJV).

Sealed with the Impression of Holiness

God has predestined our holiness. If we are called into His family He will be sure that we bear the family likeness. Ephesians 4:30 tells us that all Christians “*were sealed for the day of redemption.*” God’s Holy Spirit has sealed us. In other words, Christians have the impression of God’s likeness on their soul when they are regenerated. Regeneration is God giving to us the new nature. With that sealing of the Holy Spirit, every child of God is guaranteed to become more and more like Jesus Christ. As the Apostle said, this is a process that is ongoing “*for the day of redemption.*” This is the reason theologians have come to call this process *progressive* sanctification.

The Teaching of Romans

❧
 “...it is impossible that those who are endued with [divine faith] should not work always towards good works without ceasing.”

WILLIAM TYNDALE

❧

We see God’s predestination unto holiness for all genuine Christians again in Romans 8:28-30. We are *predestined* to be conformed to the image of Christ. All who God “*foreknew*” and “*called*” and “*justified*” (i.e. all true Christians) are predestined to live in some measure of holiness and blamelessness, being “*conformed to the image of his Son*”. Who is Paul talking about? Again, it must be emphasized that Paul is speaking of all true Christians without exception. All who are predestined are called. All who are

called are justified. All whom God justified, He is conforming to the image of His Son, and He will one day glorify them with sinlessly perfect nature and body in glory. Paul is referring to the entire glorified Church of God and only those in that Body.

If you are called, you are not simply called to be forgiven of your past sins, but you are called to forsake your present sins and *follow Christ*, thereby being *conformed to His image*. This call is an inward compulsion from the Holy Spirit who is now resident inside of you (1 Corinthians 6:19). This is the purpose of God drawing a sinner to Himself—to conform and mold him into the image of Christ. As has already been stated, a Christian will fail along the way. He will be very aware of his daily failure, but he will cling to Christ on his journey to holiness. And day by day he will be more and more conformed to the image of Christ. This purpose of God cannot be defeated in any one of His chosen people. If some measure of a holy life does not follow salvation, then God’s purpose in saving that person is defeated, which is, of course, impossible. We are predestined to walk in good works and to be conformed to the image of Jesus Christ. If that can be taken away from this chain of redemption, then our whole salvation falls.

An Objection

Someone might say that demanding holiness makes works a necessary element of salvation. No evangelical Christian believes a person is saved by works. The argument is a straw man. It is easy to stand up and blow down instead of dealing with the real nature of genuine fruit producing faith. Any child could quote Ephesians 2:8-9 and easily defeat this argument. As Ephesians 2:8-10 says, we are not saved *by* good works but *for* good works. As Charles Spurgeon said:

There is no one who can live in sin,—drinking, swearing, lying, and so on,—who can truly declare that he is one of the Lord's chosen people.... From my very soul, I detest everything that in the least savours of the Antinomianism which leads people to prate about being secure in Christ while they are living in sin. We cannot be saved *by* or *for* our good works, neither can we be saved *without* good works. Christ never will save any of His people *in* thier sins; He saves His people *from* their sins. If a man is not desiring to live a holy life in the sight of God, with the help of the Holy Spirit, he is still “in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity.”²⁸

Our very repentance is a gift from God (Acts 11:18; 2 Timothy 2:25). Harry Ironside (1876-1951), the one-time pastor of the Moody Church in Chicago said, “Theologians may wrangle over this, but the fact is, no man repents until the Holy Spirit produces repentance in his soul through the truth.”²⁹ Man repents, but he does so as a result of God’s work in his heart through the Word of God. This is the work of God, not of man! So works are the fruit of the work of God after regeneration has occurred. Anything else is “*filthy rags*” (Isaiah 64:6, NKJV).

As George Whitefield said, “Works? Works? A man get to heaven by works? I would as soon think of climbing to the moon on a rope of sand!”³⁰ Works have nothing to do with justification. We are justified by grace through childlike faith and not of works (Ephesians 2:8-9). Yet if we are God’s “*workmanship*” then He will bring good works to pass in our lives as a

²⁸ Charles Spurgeon. *Autobiography, Volume 1* (London: Passmore and Alabaster, 1899), 258.

²⁹ Harry Ironside. *Except Ye Repent* (New York: American Tract Society, 1937), 5.

³⁰ Edward S. Ninde. *George Whitefield: Prophet and Preacher* (Whitefish, MT: Kes-singer Publishing, 2006), 207.

proof of the new nature (Ephesians 2:10). God produces the desire for holiness in the Christian, so that salvation from beginning to end is all of God's grace (Philippians 2:12-13). R.C. Sproul explains how the transformation is ongoing throughout the life of a Christian:

...the instant that true justifying faith is present in the life of the believer, the person begins to change. That change will be evidenced in a life that moves to obedience. Good works necessarily flow out of true faith. The works do not justify us. It is the righteousness of Christ that justifies us. But if the works do not follow, it is proof positive that we do not have genuine faith and are therefore still unjustified people.³¹

The Bible's firm contention is that if a person does indeed experience the new birth (i.e. regeneration) he will inevitably change. Shall the holiest Being in the universe take up His habitation in a person's heart, and that person not change in holiness?

God's unalterable purpose for every one of His redeemed children is to conform them in this life to the magnificent image of Jesus Christ (Romans 8:29). God sends His Spirit into their hearts to "cause" it to happen (Ezekiel 36:27). This is the doctrine of progressive sanctification, or progressive holiness. All who are genuine Christians will most definitely become more and more like Christ. We either believe this doctrine or we do not. We find it everywhere in the Scriptures.

The Teaching of Hebrews and Philippians

Hebrews 12 and Philippians 1 are also clear about this. Hebrews 12:2 tells us that Jesus Christ is not only the "Author" of

³¹R.C. Sproul. *Pleasing God* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1994), 153.

the Christian's faith, but He is also the "*Finisher*" (NKJV). As Paul tells us in Philippians 1:6, "*he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.*" Christ conquered death to make us holy like Himself. This pursuit of holiness is the *fruit* of the new heart.

Every child of God has been regenerated, given a new nature, passed from death to life, or as John so often says, "*born again*" (John 3:3). It is true that the Christian is declared righteous in justification, but he is also born again, and in this regeneration the gracious gift of the new nature is predestined to produce holiness, "*without which no one will see the Lord*" (Hebrews 12:14). Let us not give comfort to any among us who is not producing some measure of the fruits of holiness in his life from the depth of his heart. If a person is born again, God's fingerprints will be all over the thoughts, words, and actions of that person's life. Good works always grow out of the good, regenerated heart (Matthew 7:17-18).

The Teaching of 2 Corinthians

Paul says in 2 Corinthians 5:17, "*Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.*" Why must the old sinful life go and the new holy life take its place?—Because we are Christ's new creation. Just as God spoke the worlds into existence, and so there was light and life, so God has set us on a path of light and life through the new nature. The new heart (new nature) produces a new way of living. New and godly and God-pleasing fruit are coming out of the Christian's life if he is born again—guaranteed by the eternal decree of God from before the foundation of the world.

The Teaching of Our Lord

As we have shown, it is unmistakably true that all who are called and justified in Jesus Christ will be conformed in some noticeable measure to His image (Romans 8:29-30). If the nature is changed, the fruit of the life will change. The apostles received this teaching from the Lord: “*every healthy tree bears good fruit*” (Matthew 7:17). Regeneration always has verifiable evidence. “*Thus you will recognize them by their fruits.*” was our Lord’s promise (Matthew 7:20). Those who teach otherwise must either ignore or twist the Scriptures. Let us take heed to the words of William Tyndale:

Right faith is a gift wrought by the Holy Ghost in us, which changes us, turns us into a new creature with a new nature, and ‘births’ us anew in God making us the sons of God....Right faith kills the old Adam, and makes us all together new in our heart, mind, will, desire, and in all our affections and powers of the soul. It brings the Holy Ghost with it in us. Faith is a lively thing, mighty in working, valiant, and strong, ever doing, ever fruitful so that it is impossible that those who are endued with it should not work always towards good works without ceasing.³²

What shall we say then? Every person who calls himself a saint should examine the fruit of his life to see if he is walking in the good works God has ordained for him. “*Examine yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith*” (2 Corinthians 13:5). All they that are in Christ “*are called, and chosen, and faithful*” (Revelation 17:14). Say with the disciples, “*Is it I?*”

³² William Tyndale. *New Testament, Preface to the Book of Romans* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1996, reprint—originally published in 1534), 212-213.

(Matthew 26:22), and let the verdict be given by the indwelling Holy Spirit who witnesses within the spirit of every child of God that he is a child of God (Romans 8:16).

2

Regeneration of Heart Produces a Radical Change of Life



*“...the Israelites could not gaze at Moses' face
because of its glory”*

2 CORINTHIANS 3:7



Moses was on the mountain for forty days and forty nights. When he came down from that holy place, people observed that his countenance was shining with the glories of God. So intense was the reflection that he had to veil his face. Moses had been in the presence of the holy God of the universe.



“A regenerated child of God has the very presence inside his being which Moses dwelt with only outwardly upon the mountain.”



A regenerated child of God has the very presence inside his being which Moses beheld outwardly upon the mountain. Christians are “*partakers of the divine nature*” (2 Peter 1:4). Moses’ countenance glowed because of this divine presence. How much more shall the very life of a Christian glow with God’s holiness who is indwelt by the One before whom the angels continually cry:

“*holy, holy, holy*”? The “carnal Christian” teaching is in error because it denies the necessary evidence of the radical transformation of nature through the new birth, or *regeneration*. In this spiritual rebirth “our eyes are opened to the things of God”.³³ Sighted people walk quite differently than the blind. So it is with those who have spiritual sight.

Isaac Newton, in articulating the law of motion, said, “To every action, there is an equal and opposite reaction”.³⁴ So it is with regeneration. The action of God in regeneration produces the reaction of a holy life (i.e. sanctification). God puts holiness into your very heart and nature, and as a result you are start liv-

³³ R.C. Sproul. *Pleasing God* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1994), 16.

³⁴ A.M. Worthington. *The Dynamics of Rotation* (New York: Longmans, Green, & Company, 1906), 82.

ing a holy life. Concerning the necessity of sanctification following regeneration, Martin Luther said:

The sun must needs shine—that is a necessity; but it is not by reason of any law that he shines, but by his nature, by a quality inherent and immutable. It was created to shine. Even so one that is justified and regenerate doeth good works not by any law or constraint, but by an unchangeable necessity.³⁵

Two Illustrations of the Nature Change

Jesus said, “*In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven*” (Matthew 5:16). He said, “*every healthy tree bears good fruit*” (Matthew 7:17). Obviously the light and the tree being good are referring to a transformed nature that shines, or that produces good fruit. Where does the light come from? Where does the good fruit come from? It is the product of God’s work of regeneration. There is a nature change that transforms our darkened, evil heart into a good heart which radiates with a life of good works. The light comes from the God who dwells within: this is why people give glory to the God of heaven for it. In other words, where there is the divine presence dwelling in a person, light comes forth.

Delivered from the Power of Darkness

A regenerated heart has the power to conquer sin in some measure. How can this be? It is possible because of the work of Jesus Christ. God the Father has “*delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved*

³⁵ Martin Luther. *The Life of Martin Luther, Gathered from His Own Writings* (New York: A.A. Kelley Publisher, 1858), 306-307.

Son" (Colossians 1:13). We are now "*light in the Lord*" (Ephesians 5:8). We have been resurrected from spiritual death to "*walk in newness of life*" (Romans 6:4). A genuine Christian always has some measure of holiness in his life. This is something the Lord has done. Christ has delivered us from the very power of darkness. This truth is all over the Scriptures. "*For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them*" (Ephesians 2:10). The truth is, whoever God creates anew as His "masterpiece", He is going to cause to walk in holiness. Before salvation we were all like sheep going astray. Now the God who transforms us from darkness to light, foreordains the good works that we should walk in each day that those who are now "*light*" would be always trying to "*discern what is pleasing to the Lord*" by the fruit that comes out of their new heart (Ephesians 5:8-10).

A. W. Tozer said:

The whole purpose of God in redemption is to make us holy and to restore us to the image of God.³⁶

On December 24, 1882, Charles Haddon Spurgeon uttered these sober words:

Are you nominally a Christian, and yet your Christianity does not make you holy? I implore you to throw such worthless Christianity to the dogs, for it is worse than useless to you.³⁷

³⁶ A. W. Tozer. *The Root of the Righteous* (Harrisburg, PA: Christian Publications, 1955), 25.

³⁷ Charles Spurgeon. *Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit, Volume 46*, Sermon 2674, "Learning in Private What We Teach in Public" (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1900), 290.

The very essence of salvation is not simply that the Christian has the forgiveness of his sins, but that he has entered into a new humanity as a new creation of God with a new and holy nature producing the evidence of a holy and godly life, with a view toward the final redemption which is the ultimate eradication of his sinful nature. Without a holy life, there is no evidence at all that a person actually possesses a regenerated heart or possesses the indwelling Holy Spirit of God. Without regeneration, a person is no Christian at all (Romans 8:14).

William Tyndale rightly said of the gift of divine faith:

...it is impossible that those who are endued with it should not work always towards good works without ceasing.³⁸

The evidence of regeneration is a holy life. Harry A. Ironside, former pastor of the historical Moody Church in Chicago cried out for this in his day. In his defense of true regeneration he wrote:

“we have a myriad of glib-tongued professors today who give no evidence of regeneration whatever. Prating of salvation by grace, they manifest no grace in their lives. Loudly declaring they are justified by faith alone, they fail to remember that *‘faith without works is dead’*.”³⁹

³⁸ William Tyndale. “Prologue to the Book of Romans” from *Tyndale’s New Testament* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1996, reprint—originally published in 1534), 213.

³⁹ Harry A. Ironside. *Except Ye Repent* (New York: American Tract Society, 1937), 3.

A Transformation of Heart Produces Transformation of Life

Without regeneration, the natural man has no spiritual perception. He looks at Christ and the Gospel as irrational and foolish (1 Corinthians 2:14). Until Christ does a supernatural work of opening the eyes, the understanding will remain darkened. 2 Corinthians 4:4, says it well. The “*god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.*” In order for a person to have the power for holiness there is an absolute necessity of regeneration. The only reason Paul can give us commands like the one found in Ephesians 5:8, “*walk as children of light*”, is because of this radical transformation that has taken place (“*for at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord*”). No lasting and meaningful change is possible without a new heart. Christians can change because they are “*partakers of the divine nature*” (2 Peter 1:4). Peter is not teaching new doctrine here. If it is new, it is probably not true. The apostle Peter is referring to what the prophet Ezekiel taught six hundred years earlier.

And I will give them one heart, and a new spirit I will put within them. I will remove the heart of stone from their flesh and give them a heart of flesh, that they may walk in my statutes and keep my rules and obey them. And they shall be my people, and I will be their God. But as for those whose heart goes after their detestable things and their abominations, I will bring their deeds upon their own heads, declares the Lord God (Ezekiel 11:19-21).

Ezekiel has described the new birth. What marks born again people as belonging to God is that they walk in God’s

statutes and keep His ordinances and do them. This is exactly what all the prophets and apostles and Christ Himself taught. It is nothing new. Through the new birth, God the Father has “*delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son*” (Colossians 1:13). The “*power*” of God’s Spirit within us delivers us from the “*domain of darkness*” through Christ being King of our hearts. This is the nature change that takes place in regeneration. Without this nature change, no spiritual change is possible. As Job says, “*Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? There is not one*” (Job 14:4). A transformation of heart produces a transformation of living, but without it, no meaningful change is impossible.

Those With No Fruit Perish Eternally

A rough man with a loud voice dressed in a garment of camel’s hair warns of the danger of not understanding regeneration rightly. Imagine John the Baptist crying out to a first century crowd of religious Jews: “*Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees. Every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire*” (Luke 3:9). And so all true Christians must lift up their voices in this day. He who has not the fruit of regeneration in his life will perish in the fires of everlasting hell. John is not saying that holiness saves anyone—may it never be! We are saved by grace based on nothing in us—and being saved we radiate the holiness of the One dwelling in us. Paul concurs with John: “*You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him... For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.*” (Romans 8:9, 14).

Not Sinless Perfection, but a Striving after Perfection

It is not that a Christian is free from all sin, but he yearns to be free from sin and fights against it because he is a “*partaker of the divine nature*” (2 Peter 1:4). Through this heavenly nature, he constantly fights and struggles against the deceitful lusts of his flesh that will plague him until death or the resurrection of our bodies. Like Paul we have not yet attained. We share in his struggle against sin and often, even daily say, “*Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?*” (Romans 7:24). We “*put no confidence in the flesh*” (Philippians 3:3). It is in no way sinless perfection but a striving after perfection and holiness, or what is better called Christlikeness.

The Call to Be Perfect

The Lord tells us in many places to pursue Christlikeness. He says: “*love one another: just as I have loved you*” (John 13:34). He says, “*You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect*” (Matthew 5:48). The apostles give the same testimony. John says, “*whoever says he abides in [Christ] ought to walk in the same way in which he walked*” (1 John 2:6; cf. 1:5-10; 2:1, 3-5, 24, 29; 3:3, 6-10, 24; 5:2-3). Peter pleads, “*but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct*” (1 Peter 1:15). And yet honesty compels us to admit that these are impossible standards to keep. God's standard for the believer is so unbelievably high, there is no way a Christian could ever meet it, humanly speaking. It can only be fulfilled as we walk in the power of the Holy Spirit. John Owen said, “We can have no power from Christ unless we live in a

persuasion that we have none of our own”.⁴⁰ The standard of Christ-dependence will never be met perfectly, but it will be progressed toward. This is only possible because of regeneration.

We conclude that Christians may sin, but they do not wallow in it as the practice of their lives. As a practice, Christians are those with a new nature who “*work out [their] own salvation with fear and trembling*”, and yet they know that “... *it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure*” (Philippians 2:12-13). Our desire is to “*grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ*” (2 Peter 3:18).

The Scriptures teach that all those who are justified by grace live a God-ordained holy life precisely because they have a new nature and transformed heart. This becomes even clearer as we look at three key passages: Ezekiel 36, Jeremiah 31, and Matthew 7.

The Teaching of Ezekiel

Ezekiel tells us that the believer’s heart has been transformed, and he has been given a new nature. The old heart of stone has been taken out. A tender heart of flesh that yearns to do God’s will is put in place of the stubborn, stony heart.

And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules (Ezekiel 36:26-27).

⁴⁰ John Owen. *Works, Volume 3: On the Holy Spirit* (Philadelphia: Leighton Publications, 1862), 619.

God Himself has decreed that all who are born again will walk in the good works of holiness that He has ordained. He puts His Spirit in us and actually causes us to “*walk in His statutes*”. The necessary evidence of regeneration is holy living. If we deny the necessity of this evidentiary obedience, we are arguing with the Almighty. Jay Adams describes the ministry of the Holy Spirit in the regenerated person well:

The Holy Spirit is called holy...because He is the Source of all holiness. This point is specifically emphasized in Romans 1:4 where, in an unusual construction, He is called “the Spirit of holiness.” The holiness of God’s people that results from their sanctification by the Holy Spirit must be attributed entirely to Him as He works through His Word.”⁴¹

He goes on to say that “the Holy Spirit, whose principal work in the regenerated man is to sanctify him (cf. also Ezekiel 36:25-27), must be considered the most important Person” in the context of helping people grow and change.⁴² If a person is lost, there will be little or no genuine desire for holiness because he lacks the divine presence.

The Teaching of Jeremiah

The carnal Christian doctrine makes the Lordship of Jesus Christ in a believer’s life optional and unnecessary. These false teachers say that you can have Jesus as Saviour, but you can accept His Lordship at another time if at all. Jeremiah tells us what life will be like in the New Testament church:

⁴¹ Jay Adams. *The Christian Counselor’s Manual* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1973), 6-7.

⁴² Ibid.

Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah... I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts... I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more (Jeremiah 31:31-34).

Again, God speaks not simply of the Christian's forgiveness, but of a new disposition of the heart toward God's law—one of concern and desire to live according to God's ways. Matthew Henry says concerning this law written in the hearts of believers, that God...

...makes them in care to observe it, for that which we are solicitous [*seriously concerned*] about is said to lie near our hearts. He works in them a disposition to obedience, a conformity of thought and affection to the rules of the divine law, as that of the copy to the original.⁴³

Notice it is not just the law, because every person on earth has the law in his heart in the sense of having a conscience. But it is a *love* and *concern* for God's law because it is not simply written on the mind to accuse or excuse a person, but on the heart, to incline the affections to love the rule and Lordship of God. It is a love to be ruled by God. To put God's law into our inward parts creates a hunger and thirst for righteousness⁴⁴ (i.e. conformity to Jesus Christ). Those who are part of the Kingdom of Christ seek first the Kingdom of God and his righteousness (Matthew 6:33).

⁴³Matthew Henry. *Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1996), Jeremiah 31:33.

⁴⁴ Matthew 5:6

The Teaching of the Lord Jesus

A person with a regenerated heart cannot put up with continuing in sin because he has a new nature that has the King Jesus ruling in his heart. This is the teaching of Christ Himself in Matthew 7. The Lord begins talking about those who promote false teachings. These are not just the TD Jakes and Joel Osteens of the world. These false teachers are found in our churches posing as seemingly harmless people. Christ lifts up His voice with the following words:

Beware of false prophets [or false professors for that matter], who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves. You will recognize them by their fruits. Are grapes gathered from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? So, every healthy tree bears good fruit, but the diseased tree bears bad fruit. A healthy tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a diseased tree bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus you will recognize them by their fruits (Matthew 7:15-20).

In other words, a good tree (or nature) produces good fruit. A corrupt tree (or nature) produces foul fruit. 2 Peter 1:4 tells us that all Christians are “*partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire.*” Christians no longer in their hearts lust after the world like they once did because they have a new nature that opposes the old nature.

Jesus very plainly stated that if we are to see the kingdom of heaven we “*must be born again*” (John 3:3). The born again person, by definition, has a new, regenerated heart that delights in the Law of Christ and His rule in their life. A professing Christian may call himself a carnal Christian to excuse his car-

nal living, but the contention of the Scriptures is that he is no Christian at all.

The Trial of William Tyndale

William Tyndale wrote a book on this very point and was condemned to death for this, among other things. He made the following statement at his trial where he was condemned to burn at the stake. When asked whether faith alone justified a man—he made a clear distinction that works follow regeneration. They are the proof of the regenerated heart.

The fruit that grows on a tree does not make the tree good or bad. It only makes known whether the tree is a good tree or a bad tree. Works do not make a man good or bad. They only make it plain to other men that he who performs those works is good or bad. The man is reconciled before God by faith alone and works are only to make this justification known before men.⁴⁵

Praise God that we are never alone in sanctification. It is Christ Himself that resides in us ruling in us and motivating us for holiness. We have the new nature compelling us. Indeed from beginning to end the indwelling Christ is our “*wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and re-*



“[Christianity] is not a matter of words.

Any man can say, ‘Lord! Lord!’ but if he still goes on with his sin...he is not a justified man.”

D. MARTYN LLOYD JONES



⁴⁵ William Tyndale. “Parable of the Wicked Mammon” from Robert Demaus’s *William Tyndale, a Biography: A Contribution to the Early History of the English Bible* (London: The Religious Tract Society, 1886), 424.

demption” (1 Corinthians 1:30). In other words He is in all true Christians giving them wisdom, conforming their minds to Himself; He is before God mediating their righteousness; He is living in and through them, accomplishing their sanctification; and all of this is possible because He has paid the price with His own blood in purchasing their redemption and pardon from underneath the condemnation of the Law and the slavery of sin. Those who are truly born again are those who have the Spirit of Christ working holiness in them and through them and out of them. We can say with Paul: “*Christ...lives in me*” (Galatians 2:20). God works out the holiness in the lives of all genuine Christians. If this is not happening, the divine nature is not present within that person. To deny the necessity of this holiness is a denial of the work of Christ and His Spirit that takes place after conversion in every Christian.

There is no other manner to verify the new birth except through the evidence of a life of holiness and good works. As D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones said, Christianity “is not a matter of words. Any man can say, ‘Lord! Lord!’ but if he still goes on with his sin there is no value in it, he is not a justified man. A man who is justified is a man to whom the process [of progressive sanctification] has been applied.”⁴⁶ As Jesus said, “*You will recognize them by their fruits.*” We measure the reality of regeneration by the kind of fruit that proceeds from a person’s life. Our Lord gave us no other measure.

⁴⁶ David Martyn Lloyd-Jones. *Christian Unity: Studies in Ephesians, Chapter 4, Verses 1 Through 16* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1972), 351.

3

Christians are by Definition Followers of Christ



*“I have but one desire now, to live a life of reckless abandon
for God, putting all my energy and strength in it.”*

ED McCULLY

(MISSIONARY, MARTYR)



These words are not exceptional but the normal expressed desire of every true child of God. Christians are by definition those who follow Christ from the heart. Our Lord defined a Christian unambiguously: “*My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me*” (John 10:27).

Man by Nature Cannot Follow Christ

Since the Scriptures teach that no man by nature seeks after God (Romans 3:11), it is impossible for anyone to follow Christ without the divine calling of God in the heart. No man can come to Christ “*unless the Father...draws him*” (John 6:44). Man by nature is unable to follow Christ. As R. C. Sproul so eloquently said:

What is the non-Christian seeking? One thing we know he is not seeking. He is not seeking God. Paul declares, “There is none who seeks after God” (Romans 3:11). The unbeliever never, never, never seeks God. The unbeliever is a fugitive from God. The natural pattern for man is to run from Him, to hide from Him. Jesus came to seek and to save the lost. He is the Seeker; we are the ones who are running. In man's sinful state he may look to answers to life's puzzles, but he does not seek God.⁴⁷

The Context of Following Christ

Every creature is called to follow Christ. In His ministry, our Lord went across the countryside compelling men to follow Him. We can hear Christ's command, “*Follow me*” in our hearts today. Christ did not simply call us to give mental ascent to His claims, but to actually *follow Him*.

⁴⁷ R. C. Sproul. *Pleasing God* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1994), 30-31.

A Disciple is a Follower

Throughout the life of Christ, the Lord called men to be His disciples. A disciple is a follower. We are to “*follow in His steps*” (1 Peter 2:21). We were originally made in the likeness and image of God to reflect and follow our Creator.

And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness....So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them (Genesis 1:26-27).

Adam, and thereby all mankind, fell into sin and ceased following Him. After Adam, we are all born following our own way (Ephesians 2:1-3). But God has chosen to call us back to Himself. Through redemption in Christ, God is now in the business of not only converting our hearts but also conforming us “*to the image of His Son*” (Romans 8:29). The Great Commission compels us not only to evangelize people with the message of Christ’s death in our place and resurrection; indeed,

we are to make actual *followers* of Christ from every nation.



“God calls us not to make professors of Christ, but *followers* of Christ and imitators of God.”



Be Imitators of God

Based on the Great Commission’s emphasis of making followers of Christ, it is not surprising that Paul tells us in Ephesians that true Christians are to become “*imitators*” of our Heavenly Father “*beloved children*” (Ephesians 5:1).

The deepest desire of the Christian’s new heart is to imitate God’s moral attributes. From this we can see that a

Christian is not simply one who has memorized a creed or believes a certain doctrinal statement. Neither do we simply gain a new religion, trying to follow a set of rules. God has “*caused us to be born again to a living hope*” (1 Peter 1:3) into His family, and we want to follow our Father. Every proud father wants all around him to notice his resemblance in his son or daughter. So God the Father has imparted unto us His likeness as His “*dear children*”. We are “*partakers of the divine nature*” (2 Peter 1:4). We are related. We are not merely well-educated in Christianity but God’s very sons and daughters with His image and likeness. We have been transformed from “*children of wrath*” to “*vessels of mercy*”. A supernatural event has taken place. The core of our being—what makes us tick—has changed. This is why we can imitate God. We have taken on the family likeness. We are growing and changing into the image of Christ. We are inwardly “*sealed*” with the impression of holiness by the Holy Spirit of God (Ephesians 4:30). It is our highest joy to imitate God, because it is now the very fabric of our nature.

God has imprinted His likeness in the heart of every true believer and re-created our inner being into the “*new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness*” (Ephesians 4:24). In that transformation, God put within our nature the capacity to desire true righteousness and holiness. As a bird loves to fly like the mother and father bird that birthed him, so a Christian loves to imitate His Heavenly Father. A true child of God finds it pure joy and pleasure to imitate God. Why? Because he has been given the capacity to imitate God. It is now his nature.

The Call to Follow Christ

Jesus Christ came into this world not to call those who think they are righteous, but “*sinners to repentance*” (Luke 5:32). He calls out to those who have a “*heart to perceive, and eyes to see, and ears to hear*”. Though the Gospel goes out to all the world, it is only those who have their senses touched by God’s sovereign grace who come. Moses gave the reason for Israel’s senselessness long ago. He gave a message to those who had seen all the miracles in coming out of Egypt, and the miraculaous provisions in the wilderness, but chose rather to die in the dry desert rather than enter into Canaan in whole hearted faith. Moses said in Deuteronomy 29:4, “*But to this day the Lord has not given you a heart to understand or eyes to see or ears to hear.*” God must call sinners to Himself. Yet the call is not issued mystically. It goes forth quite practically.

God says that as Christians, we are to give voice to His call. We are God’s mouthpiece. God asked the prophet Isaiah: “*Whom shall I send and who will go for us?*” (Isaiah 6:8). Paul asked: “*And how are they to hear without someone preaching?*” (Romans 10:14). We are “*ambassadors for Christ*” (2 Corinthians 5:20). God “*now he commands all people everywhere to repent*” (Acts 17:30). God tells us to “*Go out to the highways and hedges and compel people to come in, that my house may be filled*” (Luke 14:23).

Many are called, but few seem interested in coming. Of course we have the wonderful assurance from Christ that “*All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out*” (John 6:37). A fixed number, known only to the Triune Godhead, are actually given the ability to come to Christ. “*For many are called, but few are chosen*” (Matthew 22:14). Few actually are chosen to receive the

effectual calling of Romans 8:30, “*whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified*”. This is the call that awakens sinners from their slumber. We hear the inward call of Christ in our hearts: “*Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you*” (Ephesians 5:14). That awakening is seen outwardly in a person’s faith and repentance.

Christ, the Preacher of the Call

God’s call to the sinner is not simply a Bible principle on a black and white textbook page or simply the voice of a preacher. This call is the very voice of Christ transforming sinners into saints and motivating Christians to Christlikeness. I recently came across a surprising phrase in the Bible that expresses this idea beautifully. Paul, speaking to the Ephesians says that Christ “*came and preached peace to you which were afar off*” (Ephesians 2:17). Even though Paul gave the call to repentance and faith in Christ, he says it was Christ Himself who came and preached reconciliation to the sinners in Ephesus.

Actually, the idea of Christ coming as our Prophet is a very ancient teaching. Moses predicted Christ would come as a Prophet to all His elect people. The famous prophecy is found in Deuteronomy 18:15,

The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your brothers—it is to him you shall listen

It is a miracle that any one of us can hearken unto God’s voice! God has made our hearing possible through His Son. The “*dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live*” (John 5:25). God spoke in many diverse ways in the Old Testament through dreams, visions, and direct prophecies by the prophets but “*in these last days he has spoken to us*

by his Son” (Hebrews 1:1-2). Christ is the preacher of the call. “Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts” (Hebrews 3:7-8).

The Cost of Following Christ

This nature change allows us to obey the call to follow Christ. Jesus describes it as a complete forsaking of all other loyalties. Following Jesus is a death to my life and a receiving of His life. I lose my agenda for His. He said:

Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. And whoever does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it (Matthew 10:37-39).

So many say they are Christ followers, but what is the test? The writer of Hebrews tells us that truly justified people live by faith until the very end: “*but my righteous one shall live by faith, and if he shrinks back, my soul has no pleasure in him*” (Hebrews 10:38). Jesus said in Luke 9:62, “*No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God.*” He says in John 8:31, “*If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples.*” The true test of whether or not we are partakers of the divine nature is if that nature bears fruit until the very end.

Our Pursuit of Christ Lasts Until Death

The Christian life begins with the inward calling of God in the heart, but it is vital to understand that this calling continues to the very end motivating the believer onward to holiness. God

calls us not to make professors of Christ, but *followers* of Christ and imitators of God. This is the point of Romans 8:29-30:

For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.

This effectual call is certainly initially a call to *come* to Christ, but we find that it is also a call throughout the Christian's life to be *conformed* to Christ. This is seen all the way through the Word of God. A Christian is said to be one who is:

- “*press[ing] on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus*” (Philippians 3:14)
- “*looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith*” (Hebrews 12:2)
- “*seek[ing] first the kingdom of God and his righteousness*” (Matthew 6:33).
- setting our “*affection on things above, not on things on the earth*” (Colossians 3:2)

Christians are those who:

- “*[hate] even the garment stained by the flesh*” (Jude 23).
- “*put off the old self with its practices*” (Colossians 3:9)

We are called to fight against the lusts of the old life we lived. Paul says we are to “*mortify*” or ‘put to death’ our earthly inclinations such as “*sexual immorality, impurity, passion [i.e. lusts], evil desire, and covetousness*” (Colossians 3:5). In another place he says: “*present yourselves to God as those who*

have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness” (Romans 6:13). Christians are those who are “alive from the dead”, and are therefore now naturally inclined to this submission to God. The test of the new heart is whether or not we are submitted to God.

This is exactly what Paul teaches to the Corinthian assembly. You can hear him almost preaching to this congregation:

Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. So I do not run aimlessly; I do not box as one beating the air. But I discipline my body and keep it under control, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified (1 Corinthians 9:25-27).

Paul’s implication is that a person with a truly regenerated heart will persevere in Christlikeness until the very end. Sometimes this offends people. I believe it only offends those who would want an excuse not to follow Christ. Regardless, as we have established already, this is Christ work. Christ Himself is faithful to do this work in each of His elect people. Paul says, “*the God of peace himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. He who calls you is faithful; he will surely do it*” (1 Thessalonians 5:23-24). We are “*called, and chosen, and faithful*” (Revelation 17:14). God chooses and calls sinners to be saints, and He will ensure that His bride is *faithful* until the end.

What About Those who Fall Away?

There are those who seem to taste and test Christianity without actually experiencing the new birth. They may be

totally lost but have everyone in their family and church convinced that they are true believers. Those who fall away “*are crucifying once again the Son of God to their own harm and holding him up to contempt*” (Hebrews 6:6). They have no evidence that they were ever believers.

Paul writes the sad words to Timothy: “*Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world*” (2 Timothy 4:10). What a wonder that one of the companions of an apostle could be an apostate. Probably if Demas were around today, he’d be said to be a carnal Christian. We cannot miss this point in the Word of God. Those who do not follow Christ to the end, but fall away are false converts. Demas did not lose his salvation or become a carnal Christian. He was never in the faith.

The Lord tells us that those who do not have the fruit of a union with Christ are cast into eternal punishment forever. Christ says,

I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing. If anyone does not abide in me he is thrown away like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned (John 15:5-6).

Those who teach that a Christian can be anything but a follower of Christ go against the teaching of our Lord and of His apostles. We can have great hope that all true Christians by definition will follow Christ until the very end.



What Christ Begins He Promises to Finish



“You can no more separate justification from sanctification than you can separate the circulation of the blood from the inhalation of the air.”

ARCHIBALD ALEXANDER HODGE



The book of Hebrews tells us that Christ paid the price for our sins with His own blood, not simply to give us a faith that would save us, but to give us a faith that would propel us to the very end in holiness. Whatever Christ plants, he will bring to a full harvest, but he also said, *“Every plant that my heavenly Father has not planted will be rooted up”* (Matthew 15:13). The work of holiness is predestined by the Father for all those He chooses to salvation. Christ says, *“All that the Father gives me will come to me ... And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day”* (John 6:37, 39). Christ is *“the author and finisher of our faith”* (Hebrews 12:2, NKJV). This faith brings us a full salvation, including not only justification and pardon, but conformity to Christ in this life (sanctification) and ultimately glorification, which is final conformity to the image of Christ (Romans 8:29-30). The carnal Christian teaching does not teach the *full* salvation of the believer.

Christ Promises a Full Salvation

Christ did not die only to justify us, but in salvation He also sanctifies us, and He will glorify us (Romans 8:29-30). *“God from the beginning chose you for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth”* (2 Thessalonians 2:13 NKJV). Our Lord died for the ungodly in order to save them from their sins in this life and to save them to the uttermost. It is Christ’s work to finish, and it was as good as done from the very foundation of the world. He says to the sheep on the Last Day: *“Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world”* (Matthew 25:34). Our salvation was secure

“from the foundation of the world”. What Christ begins, He promises to finish. His promise is just as true today as when it was given to the Thessalonian church: *“He who calls you is faithful; he will surely do it”* (1 Thessalonians 5:24). He says to the Corinthians that God *“will sustain you to the end, guiltless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord”* (1 Corinthians 1:8-9).

What Christ has begun in your justification He will continue in your sanctification and he will complete in your glorification. Remember the words of Paul to the Philippians:

And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ (Philippians 1:6).

What Does a Full Salvation Look Like?

We seem to view our salvation as one dimensional. To be saved is simply to be forgiven. When the Bible speaks of salvation it certainly encompasses that, but it is so much more than that. The easiest way to look at it is from the vantage point of time: past, present, and future.

Salvation is a threefold work in us. We have been justified. We have been declared righteous before God based on our complete dependance upon the righteousness and work of Christ on the Cross. But we are being sanctified, and one day He will glorify us in a sinlessly perfect body with our natures perfectly conformed to Christ (Romans 8:28-30). In salvation God not only saves us from the *penalty* of our past sin, He is delivering us from the *power* of the present temptation to sin, and one day on the day of redemption, we will be delivered

from the very *presence* of sin altogether. God will complete His work in you!

The following chart should help in visualizing exactly what Christ has promised to do with all believers.

PAST (Our Position)	PRESENT (Our Practice)	FUTURE (Our Promise)
<p><i>Election/ Foreknowledge</i></p> <p><i>Calling</i> (drawing, conviction)</p> <p><i>Regeneration - Conversion</i> (faith / repentance)</p> <p><i>Justification</i> (declared righteous—imputation occurs—my rags for Christ’s righteousness)</p> <p><i>Adoption</i> (given all the rights and privileges of a true child)</p>	<p><i>Sanctification</i> (being conformed to the image of Jesus Christ)</p> <p>In sanctification the believer continues repenting and believing...</p>	<p><i>Glorification</i> (Final redemption which will occur at the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ. The present body of each believer will be changed to a new body incapable of sinning.)</p>

Christ promises to accomplish all of the above, not only justification but also sanctification and glorification. Let us define all the above terms so we see the glory of what Christ promises to accomplish.

Salvation in the Past (Our Position)

Our salvation in the past in the Scriptures is often referred to as a past “sanctification”. This sanctification is **positional** and refers to the one-time setting apart of believers from sin unto God. Paul wrote “*To the church of God that is in Corinth, to those **sanctified** in Christ Jesus, called to be saints*”; we are “*in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and **sanctification** and redemption*” (1 Corinthians 1:2; 1:30). This occurs at the moment of conversion and refers to the believer’s position in Christ. Paul said to the Corinthian church, that at one time their lives exemplified those that would never enter into the kingdom of God, but Paul says to them: “*But you were washed, you were **sanctified**, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God*” (1 Corinthians 6:11).

This sanctification is accomplished through the blood of Christ (Hebrews 13:12), results in our eventual perfection in glory (Hebrews 10:14), and is possessed by all believers (Acts 26:18; 1 Corinthians 1:2). The Bible uses many terms to help us understand what God is doing in saving us.

Election

Before the world began, before anything was created, God existed (Genesis 1:1; John 1:1-2). And in the mind of God from eternity past was a plan to demonstrate the glory of His justice

and mercy. This could not be accomplished except for sin entering the world through Adam and God mercifully saving a group of people by giving justice to His Son Jesus Christ. This fixed number of people that the Father gave to the Son are called the *elect* (John 6:37; Ephesians 1:4; Colossians 3:12; 1 Peter 1:2). God's election of sinners occurred in eternity past and is based on absolutely nothing in the person. It was not that there was a day when God decided to elect sinners to salvation. Actually, He has always loved them and known them. God's decrees are from everlasting. Election is God from eternity past, setting His everlasting love on a group of undeserving sinners.

The LORD has appeared of old to me, saying: " Yes, I have loved you with an everlasting love; Therefore with lovingkindness I have drawn you (Jeremiah 31:3, NKJV).

Election has more to do with God than it does with man. It demonstrates that God is the only absolute sovereign. It likewise demonstrates His attributes of love, mercy, grace, and justice. God has chosen to pass over part of the human race in order to show His justice to the vessels of His wrath fitted for destruction. He has chosen to freely bestow His love on other sinners equally deserving of hell who are vessels of His mercy. Paul framed it in Romans 9:22-24:

What if God, desiring to show his wrath and to make known his power, has endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction, in order to make known the riches of his glory for vessels of mercy, which he has prepared beforehand for glory—even us whom he has called, not from the Jews only but also from the Gentiles?

Thomas Wilcox wrote in his famous tract, *Honey out of the Rock*, of how understanding election contributes to the Christian's humility:

Remember Christ's time of love when you were naked (Ezekiel 16:8,9), and then He chose you. Can you ever have a proud thought? Remember whose arms supported you from sinking and delivered you from the lowest hell (Psalm 86:13), and shout in the ears of angels and men (Psalm 148), and for ever sing praise, praise; grace, grace.⁴⁸

Both the reprobate sinners and the forgiven sinners are equally worthy of everlasting burnings in hell. The only difference between the saved and the lost is the sovereign love, mercy, and grace of God that He bestows on the elect "*in accordance with his pleasure and will...which he purposed in Christ*" (Ephesians 1:5, 9, NKJV).

Foreknowlege

Peter tells us that we are "*elect...according to the foreknowledge of God the Father*" (1 Peter 1:1-2). Paul tells us "*For those whom he foreknew he also predestined ...*" (Romans 8:29). What is God's foreknowledge? Some believe that God looked down the corridors of time and saw who would choose Him, and He chose those who would choose Him. There is really a lot wrong with that theory. First, if that is true, God did not make a choice. He simply confirmed your choice. Secondly, if this theory of foreknowledge is true, then it contradicts what God actually saw when He did look down the corridors of time.

⁴⁸ Thomas Wilcox. *Honey Out of the Rock* (Zoar Publications, 1973), 14.

He did not see any softness of heart or willingness in any one of us. In fact God looked down upon us, and it was not pretty.

The Lord looks down from heaven on the children of man, to see if there are any who understand, who seek after God. They have all turned aside; together they have become corrupt; there is none who does good, not even one (Psalm 14:2-3).

The Bible plainly says that “*no one seeks for God*” (Romans 3:11).

John Murray (1898-1975), the Scottish theologian who taught at Princeton Seminary and then left during the modernist controversy to help found the conservative Westminster Theological Seminary, explains the use of the word in the Old Testament. His conclusion on the meaning of foreknowledge is helpful:

It means "whom he set regard upon" or "whom he knew from eternity with distinguishing affection and delight" and is virtually equivalent to "whom he foreloved."⁴⁹

The clearest understanding of foreknowledge is found in the Old Testament in Jeremiah 1:5, where God tells Jeremiah personally, “*Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations.*” God’s foreknowledge is an intimate love that has lasted from eternity that includes God’s entire purpose for that person, including complete conformity to the image of Jesus Christ. He says it another way in Jeremiah 31:3, “*I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore I have continued my faithfulness to you.*” All those God loved and knew

⁴⁹ John Murray. *The Epistle to the Romans: The English Text with Introduction, Exposition, and Notes* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1997), 317.

intimately from eternity past he predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son (Romans 8:29).

Calling

Calling refers to the divine drawing of a person unto God for salvation in the span of human history. Jesus said, “*No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him*” (John 6:44). The word for draw, the Greek ἔλκω (*helkō*), is found eight times in the New Testament. The word’s main use is to drag people by force before a magistrate, or to draw a sword by force out of its sheath. Essentially it is to exercise great influence over someone or something. In two places, John 12:31 and John 6:44, it refers to God exercising an omnipotent influence over people. The calling is illustrated in John 11, where Jesus calls Lazarus from the dead. Lazarus came when Christ called.

The Bible says every person Christ calls he justifies (Romans 8:30). Of course, all men everywhere are called to repent, yet only those who are effectually called actually come and are declared righteous before God. “*For many are called, but few are chosen*” (Matthew 22:14). Christ revealed exactly who are chosen to come in John 6:37, “*All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out*”. In short, no human being knows exactly who is called, and so we are to be the mouthpiece of God’s calling and “*Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation*” (Mark 16:15). God is calling a people for Himself out of the masses. James refers to this group of people when he stands up in the Jerusalem counsel and says, “*Simeon has related how God first visited the Gentiles, to take from them a people for his name*” (Acts 15:14).

Calling is the voice of God confirming the Scriptures in the heart of man. The Spirit of God is sent to convict the heart of man, “*And when he comes, he will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment*” (John 16:8). When Paul went to Corinth, the Lord confirmed to Paul, “*I have many in this city who are my people*” (Acts 18:10). So the call goes forth into the hearts of God’s elect and draws them to the Father. And all who are called are justified (Romans 8:30).

Regeneration/Conversion

Regeneration is literally the “new genesis” in the heart of man. We look back to the moment of regeneration/conversion as the moment of our salvation. It is the creation of a new heart and a new nature (2 Corinthians 5:17; Ephesians 2:10). Regeneration is entirely the work of God in which the Holy Spirit births or creates a new heart in a totally depraved human being to bring them to Christ.

Solely the Work of God

William Shedd (1820-1894), the well-known American systematic theologian, defined the biblical concept of regeneration in his work *Dogmatic Theology*:

Respecting regeneration, the following characteristics are to be noted. First, regeneration is solely the work of God. The terms employed in Scripture prove this: “creating anew” (Eph. 4:24), “fathering” (James 1:18), “quickenings” (John 5:21; Eph. 2:5), “calling out of darkness into light” (1 Pet. 2:9), “commanding the light to shine out of darkness” (2 Cor. 4:6), “alive from the dead” (Rom. 6:13), “new creature” (2 Cor. 5:17), “born again” (John 3:3-7), “God’s workmanship” (Eph. 2:10). These terms denote a work of omnipotent power. The origination of life is

impossible to the creature. He can receive life; he can nurture life; and he can use and exert life. But he cannot create life.⁵⁰

Takes Place through the Word of God

Regeneration takes place through the Word of God (Romans 10:17) and is always accompanied by the human response of faith and repentance (Acts 20:21; 1 Thessalonians 1:9). Many metaphors have been used in the Bible to describe it.⁵¹ One of the most common biblical metaphors is that of “*quicken*ing”, or the imparting of resurrection life (Ephesians 2:1, 5, KJV). It is nothing less than a miracle of God. Man is depraved to such a degree that he is not simply sick, drowning in the ocean, waiting for the life preserver. He is dead on the bottom of the ocean waiting for the miracle of resurrection. As Puritan Thomas Boston said, “Regeneration is not so much the curing of a sick man, as the quickening of a dead man”.⁵² Erwin Lutzer, current pastor of the Moody church in Chicago said:

The regeneration of the soul must be the exclusive and supernatural work of the Holy Spirit. Salvation is by grace alone. As the American theologian William Shedd writes, “Grace is imparted to sinful man, not because he believes, but in order that he may believe; for faith itself is a gift of God.”⁵³

⁵⁰William Greenough Thayer Shedd. *Dogmatic Theology*, 3rd ed. (Phillipsburg, N.J.: Puritan and Reformed Publications, 2003), 764.

⁵¹ I have covered this on pages 120-122 of this book.

⁵² Thomas Boston. *Human Nature in its Fourfold State* (Philadelphia: Towar and J. & D. M. Hogan, 1830), 170.

⁵³ Erwin W. Lutzer. *The Doctrines that Divide* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1998), 158. Lutzer was quoting William Greenough Thayer Shedd. *A History of Christian Doctrine*, vol. 2, 3rd ed. (New York: Charles Scribner & Co., 1871), 67.

Is Authenticated by Faith and Repentance

The human will acts in faith and repentance only as it is acted upon in the drawing and calling of the Holy Spirit through the Word of God. Faith is not inborn within man (Romans 3:11) but is always produced through a force outside of man, namely, through the Word of God by which man can be “*born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God*” (1 Peter 1:23; cf. Romans 10:17; John 6:63, “*The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life*”). This gracious power is made effectual by the power of the Holy Spirit (Titus 3:5). This act of regeneration is also rightly spoken of by the believer as *conversion*. Conversion is seen in man’s repentant faith toward God as he responds to the Word of God. It is the line of demarcation that believers look to as the moment they turned “*from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God*” (Acts 26:18), when God “*delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son*” (Colossians 1:13).

Justification

To be justified is to be “declared righteous” before God a just and holy God. It is utterly based on Christ’s satisfaction of God’s wrath on the Cross plus nothing else (i.e. propitiation—Romans 3:25; cf. Ephesians 2:8-9). Justification in Christ allows God who is utterly holy and righteous to remain so by meting out justice upon Christ in in the guilty sinner’s place. God remains “*just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus*” (Romans 3:26). This justification is appropriated by faith alone. It is clear that “*a person is not justified by works of*

the law but through faith in Jesus Christ ... because by works of the law no one will be justified" (Galatians 2:16). We are never accepted in our own works, which are "*filthy rags*" (Isaiah 64:6, NKJV), but through God's free gift of Christ we are "*accepted in the Beloved*" (Ephesians 1:6, NKJV).

Adoption

The word adoption is literally "sonship", and it means to be brought into the family with all the rights and privileges of a natural born child. We are sons and daughters of God. Christ came "*to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons*" (Galatians 4:5). The idea of adoption in the Bible is to be freed from our *condemnation under the law* and the *slavery of sin* into the freedom of being a son or daughter of God. Christ paid with his own life's blood to free you from slavery to sin and to the bondage of your eternal death sentence under the law. We are freed from bondage. The way it would go in the ancient world is a slave would be purchased out of bondage and brought into the household of the Master, not as a slave, but as a son. And he would have all the rights and privileges of a natural born son. In adoption, God gives us the assurance that we are sons, and that we will inherit the universe with Christ, as he says in Galatians 4:6-7, "*And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, 'Abba! Father!'*" So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God." Adoption also confirms the promise of our future salvation, and makes us desire our final redemption, as Paul explains in Romans 8:23, "*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.*"

Salvation in the Present (Our Practice)

Sanctification is to be progressively conformed to the image of Jesus Christ (Romans 8:29). Jesus did not come simply to gain forgiveness from the **penalty** of our sins, but to save us from the **power** of sin. When Christ comes again, the very **presence** of sin will be entirely eradicated from the believer. God has promised and predestined sanctification for every one who is justified (Romans 8:29-30, 1 Thessalonians 5:23-24, Ephesians 2:10; Philippians 1:6).

Progressive Sactification

What does this progressive sanctification look like? Because of the radical change of nature that the child of God experience at conversion (i.e. regeneration, the new birth), he now “*hunger[s] and thirst[s] for righteousness*” revealed in God’s Word (Matthew 5:6; Psalm 1:2). These new desires which are given by the Holy Spirit’s presence lead the believer to a progressive sanctification through a desire to apply the Word of God to his life (Ezekiel 36:25-27; John 17:17; Galatians 5:16). By application of the Word, the Christian is able to “*put off*” the habits of the old life and “*put on*” spiritual disciplines and godly habits (Romans 6:19, 22; Ephesians 4:22-24; Psalm 1:1-3). In this process, the believer is responsible for obedience to the Word of God but is actually given the ability to obey by God (Philippians 2:12-13). This process results in a progressively holy life of victory over sinful lusts (Galatians 5:16) and usefulness for God (2 Timothy 2:21).

Our progressive sanctification begins at and flows out of regeneration where we become “*partakers of the divine*”

nature” (2 Peter 1:4) in which the very desires of God are put within the believer’s heart. As Spurgeon said:

Surely, the very holiness of God that puts into us a desire to be holy is a guarantee to us that he will help us to be holy. He that makes us long for purity will work it in us.⁵⁴

This progressive holiness is possible due to our nature being united with the nature of the Holy Spirit. “*But he who is joined to the Lord becomes one spirit with him*” (1 Corinthians 6:17). Our present holiness comes out of our union with Christ so that we can “*grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ*” (2 Peter 3:18). This holiness is progressive, and though the Christian may falter and fall into deep valleys of sin, the process of sanctification is in no way halted until the day of death or the Second Coming. The Christian should have great assurance that God is going to complete what He started.

And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ (Philippians 1:6).

He who calls you is faithful; he will surely do it (1 Thessalonians 5:24).

Salvation in the Future (Our Promise)

Glorification

Glorification refers to our final redemption when God gives us a new body that has no sinful desires. He “*will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body*” (Philippians 3:21). God will bring us finally into His presence, and He shall be our

⁵⁴ Charles Spurgeon. *Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit, Volume 26*, Sermon 2118, “The Planter of the Ear Must Hear” (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1880), 669.

God and we shall be His people (Revelation 21:3). Christ promises to the one He elects and draws to Himself to “*raise him up on the last day*” (John 6:40, 44, 54). This last day refers to the consummation of history when Christ appears in the clouds to bring home His bride and destroy the sin-cursed world to create new heavens and a new earth (2 Peter 3:9-13). There will come a day when we no longer say with Paul, “*Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?*” (Romans 7:24). “*But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed*” (2 Peter 3:10). At that moment, Christians everywhere will put off this sinful corpse of flesh that we have inherited from our father Adam, and we will put on a glorified body like our risen Saviour. In that day sin will have no more power over us. The power and the presence of sin will be completely eradicated! God will join our soul with a perfect glorified body on that Last Day “*to be like his glorious body*” (Philippians 3:21), and we will have final redemption.

The Apostles spoke of this often. John said we would be like Jesus. Listen to him:

Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is (1 John 3:2).

Paul said the same thing in 1 Corinthians 15:51-54:

Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. For this

perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality. When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written: "Death is swallowed up in victory."

One day Christ will come and redeem this sinful body of ours and give us a new body, and we will sin no more! It could happen any moment. Look to the sky—"raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near" (Luke 21:28).

Anything Less Than Full Salvation is Not Christ's Work

So, salvation is not just justification, but it is also sanctification and glorification. Christ is "*able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them*" (Hebrews 7:25).

To affirm that a Christian can live carnally, is to contradict and misunderstand what salvation is altogether. Archibald Alexander Hodge of Princeton Seminary illustrated the absurdity of this when he said:

Think of a sinner coming to Christ and saying, 'I do not want to be holy; I do not want to be saved from sin; I would like to be saved in my sins; do not sanctify me now, but justify me now'... You can no more separate justification from sanctification than you can separate the circulation of the blood from the inhalation of the air. Breathing and circulation are two different things, but you cannot have one without the other; they go together and constitute one life.⁵⁵

⁵⁵ Archibald Alexander Hodge. *Popular Lectures on Theological Themes* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1887), 358.

Paul Washer, founder of HeartCry Missionary Society which has planted over fifty churches around the world, said of those who teach the carnal Christian doctrine:

They have developed a God who has the power to justify men and fulfills all His promises in justifying the believing, but He is no longer a God who has power to save those He justifies. In America today we have all kinds of people who are supposedly saved, but these very people never grow in grace. They have never been transformed. They are carnal and worldly and they fill up our churches. They make up the majority in some of the churches. God seems to have the power to save, but He does not seem to have the power to save completely. And that is totally foreign to everything the Bible teaches about salvation.⁵⁶

How true this brother's words are. The God who has the power to justify us also has the power and the plan to sanctify His people. Regardless of whether a believer understands Christ's full salvation, Christ will bring all God's called people to holiness and final redemption. Yet Paul prays that we as believers would truly realize the hope of our calling, which is a full salvation.

Realize the Hope of God's Call to Final Redemption

The Apostle Paul realizes that human beings often doubt and are frail in their confidence concerning God's promise to finish what He started, therefore He prays for believers everywhere that they might...

⁵⁶ Paul Washer. *Is There Such a Thing As a Carnal Christian?*
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WBI568p7aSY>

...know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead (Ephesians 1:18-20).

The hope of our calling is final redemption. It is to receive the full inheritance from God—the full reward of the sufferings of Christ, which is the entire cosmos! Part of that inheritance is our final redemption when sin will be entirely eradicated from our body. But on the way to that hope, we are receiving our inheritance already. We have been given the “earnest” or downpayment of our inheritance, which is the very presence of God in the indwelling Holy Spirit. As Paul says:

...[you] were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory (Ephesians 1:13-14).

Now what is Paul’s point in these verses? It is that God is working in us according to His mighty power in the very Person of His Holy Spirit to bring us to final holiness, perfection, and conformity to Jesus Christ. And why may we have confidence that this is going to happen? Because the same power that resurrected Christ is resides each one of His children through God’s very indwelling presence.

Realize the Power that Accomplishes Sanctification

The same power that raised Jesus from the dead is also the power that will conform us to the image of Jesus Christ. God

does not just command that we be holy as He is holy (1 Peter 1:15-16). He puts within each believer the power to accomplish conformity to Christ's image. We are all "*sealed with the promised Holy Spirit*" (Ephesians 1:13). The measure of holiness we now experience is a taste of the sinless perfection we will enjoy in glory.

Christ Intercedes to Bring His People to Holiness

There is a final reason that Christ will finish what He started in every child of God. At this moment, we know that He is pleading before the Father to bring us to an entire salvation.

Consequently, he is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them (Hebrews 7:25).

I think of a popular hymn in our churches:

*Before the throne of God above
I have a strong and perfect plea.
A great high Priest whose Name is Love
Who ever lives and pleads for me.
My name is graven on His hands,
My name is written on His heart.
I know that while in Heaven He stands
No tongue can bid me thence depart.⁵⁷*

Christ is pleading not simply for our justification, but also for our sanctification and glorification. He is able to "*save to the uttermost*".

⁵⁷ Before the Throne of God Above. Words: Charitie L. Bancroft, 1863.

You might be reading this thinking, “Is there any hope for me?” Can God really sanctify me?” The answer is an absolute *yes!* All those He calls He justifies, and He conforms them to the image of Christ.

Listen to Christ’s promises to progressively sanctify you completely:

Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy, to the only God, our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen. (Jude 24-25).

He who calls you is faithful; he will surely do it (1 Thessalonians 5:24).

And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ (Philippians 1:6).

God chose you as the firstfruits to be saved, through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth (2 Thessalonians 2:13).

For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them (Ephesians 2:10).

“I will never leave you nor forsake you” (Hebrews 13:5).

who will sustain you to the end, guiltless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord (1 Corinthians 1:8-9).

All who Jesus Christ calls to forgiveness and justification He also calls to sanctification and glorification. He is able to save His people from their sins. He shall save them to the

uttermost. What joy to know that whatever Christ begins, He promises to finish.

5

The “Carnal Christian” Teaching Minimizes Sin and Promotes Hypocrisy



“It is an undoubted truth that every doctrine that comes from God, leads to God; and that which doth not tend to promote holiness is not of God.”

GEORGE WHITEFIELD



“Any concept of grace that makes us feel more comfortable sinning is not biblical grace. God's grace never encourages us to live in sin, on the contrary, it empowers us to say no to sin and yes to truth.”

RANDY ALCORN⁵⁸

 Our churches ought not promote the teaching of the carnal Christian because it leads to a state of *hypocrisy* in the church where the Spirit of God is grieved. Church leaders have a strong temptation to lean on this doctrine because it allows them to gain a larger following without offending people by dealing in earnest with the source of their sins. According to Albert N. Martin, former pastor of the Trinity Baptist Church of Montville, New Jersey, the carnal Christian doctrine has shut the mouths of pastors across our land so that they are afraid to preach true biblical repentance.

The results of this doctrine of the Carnal Christian being believed have shut the mouths of preachers because they are afraid to set out the fruits and the marks of a true Christian, and to tell men if they do not produce the fruits of repentance they have never been born again. They are afraid to do it! And this doctrine preached, believed and embraced is an easy one because it's the natural heart that loves it and has produced these results in our fundamental churches. Dear ones, I would rather die crying out against this doctrine and be called a fool and die a failure in the eyes of my generation than to ever preach that a man can enter into heaven who loves his sin.⁵⁹

⁵⁸ Fred M. Jensen. *Experience the Presence of God* (Xulon Press, 2008), 155.

⁵⁹ Albert N. Martin. “The Carnal Christian Doctrine”, audio message preached January 5, 1964 at Trinity Baptist Church of Montville, NJ.

The Lord's churches ought not promote a doctrine that leads to a state of hypocrisy in the church and perpetually grieves the Holy Spirit. We read about this in Matthew 15:8, "*This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me*". I do not want to be a part of a church like that. Spurgeon spoke of how God hates an unholy church:

An unholy church! It is useless to the world, and of no esteem among men. It is an abomination, hell's laughter, heaven's abhorrence. The worst evils which have ever come upon the world have been brought upon her by an unholy church.⁶⁰

George Whitefield said whatever doctrine is of God always leads to holiness:

It is an undoubted truth that every doctrine that comes from God, leads to God; and that which doth not tend to promote holiness is not of God."⁶¹

The idea that there is a class of Christians that can continue in sin as a lifestyle is not of God. God's work is to promote holiness in His children, not to excuse sin. The popular carnal Christian teaching of today instead of promoting holiness, dirties the matchless name of Christ and diminishes His work. God regenerates sinners not simply to forgive them, but to conform them to the image of His Son (Romans 8:29). This is the work of God in salvation. Those God justifies, He always sanctifies. God's work of salvation not only forgives the sinner but initiates a work of progressive sanctification. Sanctification always follows justification. This is God's purpose and promise for every

⁶⁰ Charles Spurgeon. *Evening by Evening* (New York: Sheldon and Company, 1869), 179.

⁶¹ George Whitefield. *Select Sermons of George Whitefield* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 1985), 64.

believer. To teach otherwise is perilous because it gives assurance to those who have no evidence that they have been regenerated. It is damaging to the name of Christ because it causes the world to charge the church correctly with hypocrisy.

Martin Luther’s Battle with the Antinomians

Luther fought this battle in his day. You will remember that Martin Luther almost single handedly set a spiritual fire in Europe that brought down the entrenched fortress of the Roman Catholic Church. How did he do it? Luther simply taught that salvation was a free gift of God which is gained by faith in Christ by grace, apart from works. When asked by his assistant Melanchthon whether a man was righteous by faith alone in Christ alone, Luther replied:

I hold so, and am certain that the true meaning of the Gospel and of the Apostles is, that we are justified before God by faith gratis; i.e. only by God's mere mercy, wherewith, and by reason whereof, he imputeth righteousness to us in Christ.⁶²

Melanchthon then asked if works had even a little part to play in salvation. Luther responded:

The mercy of God is our sole justification. The righteousness of works is but external, and can by no means deliver us from God's wrath, and sin, and death.⁶³

Justification by grace through faith alone was a radical teaching in Luther’s day, and some ran with it and turned the grace of God into a license to sin. Some in Luther’s day twisted

⁶² Martin Luther. *The Life of Martin Luther, Gathered from His Own Writings* (A.A. Kelley Publisher: New York, 1858), 306.

⁶³ Ibid.

his statements and implied that freedom from the Law meant that though a holy life for the Christian was desirable, it was not the necessary outcome of God's work in the heart. Martin Luther constantly battled the people he called the "antinomians". One modern historian, Harry Loewen, described it this way:

The Antinomians pushed Luther's doctrine of justification by faith alone to what they thought was its logical conclusion, asserting that as good works do not promote salvation, so neither do evil works hinder it. Since all Christians are necessarily sanctified by their very vocation and profession, the Antinomians argued, justified Christians are incapable of losing their spiritual holiness, justification, and final salvation by any violation of the law of God. The Antinomians preached freedom from God's law, emphasized the Gospel over the commandments of the Old Testament, and rejected any moral coercion or discipline as part of the Christian life. In all this the Antinomians at first appealed to Luther who, according to them, had freed them from all legalism.⁶⁴

Though Luther was certainly adamant that keeping the Law does not justify, he taught that a regenerate person will want to live within the bounds of God's precepts and will be enabled by the indwelling Christ to do so. Luther stood against anyone who taught that holiness did not follow true regeneration, and in 1539 wrote a pamphlet entitled *Against the Antinomians*. Loewen continues:

He taught that in Christ there is freedom from sin and the demands of the Old Testament law, but this does not mean that a Christian is free to sin or disobey the law. It is God's will that

⁶⁴ Harry Loewen. *Luther and the Radicals* (Wilfrid Laurier University Press: Ontario, Canada, 1974), 126.

the commandments are kept, and Christ enables the Christian to keep the law of God.⁶⁵

Concerning the necessity of good works following regeneration, Luther illustrated it so well:

The sun must needs shine—that is a necessity; but it is not by reason of any law that he shines, but by his nature, by a quality inherent and immutable. It was created to shine. Even so one that is justified and regenerate doeth good works not by any law or constraint, but by an unchangeable necessity. And Saint Paul saith, "We are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to good works".⁶⁶

As in Luther's day, so the Lord's people must stand today. The popular carnal Christian doctrine guts the radical transformation that takes place in regeneration. The immediate fruit of the new heart is repentance from sin and faith in Christ. A person can say he has faith in Christ all day long, but until he departs from sin, there is no evidence that regeneration has actually taken place.

Fruits Fit for Repentance

When the religious leaders came to John the Baptist he was not satisfied with an acknowledgement of wrong doing (seen by their coming)—he pushed for actual evidence of regeneration in their lives. He demanded that they actually depart from their sinful ways.

But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism, he said to them, "You brood of vipers!

⁶⁵ Ibid., 130.

⁶⁶ Luther. *The Life of Martin Luther*, 306-307.

Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bear fruit in keeping with repentance...Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees. Every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire...” (Matthew 3:7-8, 10).

John’s point was that a good root always brings forth a good fruit. Without the good fruit, then we must be persuaded that the heart is unchanged and the person is still dead in their sins. A new heart brings forth a transformed life.

To be saved does not simply mean to be forgiven of the penalty of sin, to be declared righteous, and to be released from the just condemnation of the Law (cf. Romans 8:1). It certainly is that, but in salvation there is regeneration which is an actual nature change that brings forth the fruit of repentance, which is simply the rejection and forsaking of the old life. Without the evidence of the new birth taking place (i.e. repentance) we are nothing more than a brood of vipers, still dead in sin. Regeneration always brings some form of outward fruit.

Let Everyone Who Names the Name of Christ Depart from Iniquity

According to Paul’s teaching in Scripture, those who will not bring forth the fruit of repentance by actually “*departing from iniquity*” have no right to bear Christ’s name. As Paul says, “*But God’s firm foundation stands, bearing this seal: ‘The Lord knows those who are his,’ and, ‘Let everyone who names the name of the Lord depart from iniquity’*” (2 Timothy 2:19). Those whom the Lord knows to be His are those who have a holy life separate from sin. Paul illustrates this way. He speaks of a foundation—that which a statue would be built upon, but in the statue’s place is the masterpiece of God, the Christian who

is God’s “*workmanship*” (Ephesians 2:10). This foundation would have a message around the base. Around the ring of this base would be the engraved letters sealed into that foundation. Here is God’s message on the foundation stone of the Christian life: “*The Lord knows those who are his,*” and, “*Let everyone who names the name of the Lord depart from iniquity*”. Of course God’s seal of ownership is the Holy Spirit. So the truth of this passage is that those whom the Lord marks with His seal of ownership (the Holy Spirit) depart from iniquity. Those that have been given a new nature are easy to spot: they live a life of holiness.

There is a constant turning away from sin in the life of anyone in whom the Spirit has wrought the new birth. Certainly, we have not yet attained perfect holiness. The battle against sin rages daily between the flesh and the Spirit. The eradication of our sin nature will not occur until the Day of Christ when we are glorified, and our mortal body puts on immortality. As we wait for that day, the Christian lives to daily mortify the old man and nail the old lifestyle to the cross of Christ (Romans 8:13). Every Christian says with Paul, “*I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me*” (Galatians 2:20). A Christian says “*For to me to live is Christ*” (Philippians 1:21).

To be a Christian is to be an actual follower of Jesus Christ. It is so basic it almost needs not to be stated. A person who follows after sin as a lifestyle is not a Christian. Any one who calls himself by the holiest man that ever lived and lives contrary to Him denies the Father. It is a shame how Christ’s work is diminished and his name dirtied by those who excuse an ongoing

practice of sin in the lives of professing Christians. According to 2 Timothy 2:19, they actually crumble the very foundation of Christ's work if they deny the necessity of progressive sanctification in the life.

Shall a Christian be saved, and not have the fruit of repentance flowing through his life? Jesus said to these people in Luke 6:46, "*Why do you call me 'Lord, Lord,' and not do what I tell you?*" Jesus Christ required *holiness* of all those who call Him Lord. Is there such thing as a carnal Christian, a Christian who continues in sin? God forbid. It dirties the name of Christ.

The Absurdity of the Carnal Christian Teaching

Let me illustrate the absurdity of a "carnal" Christian from Galatians 5:19-21. This passage names some of the works of carnality:

Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

To see the absurdity of labeling someone a carnal Christian, replace the word carnal with any of the works of carnality. Can a person be an *adulterous* Christian? A *lascivious* Christian? A Christian *fornicator*? A Christian *drunkard*? A Christian *reveler* (party animal)? A Christian *prostitute* or *pornographer*? A Christian *murderer*? It is one thing for a Christian to fall into pornography or to become drunk, especially if they are new in the faith. But when a sin is so prevalent that it identifies a person, it is now a practice. The Bible teaches that no true Chris-

tian practices sin as a lifestyle. The new nature is incapable of practicing ongoing sin. The name “Christian” fundamentally implies a Christlike life. To teach contrary is opposed to Scripture. It compromises the name of Christ and His promised work of sanctification in the believer.

If You Continue in the Faith

Those who have the new nature and God’s Spirit in them will never ultimately fall away from holiness. If they do, it reveals they were never sealed by the Holy Spirit of God. Consider what Paul says in Colossians 1:21-23:

And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him, if indeed you continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel that you heard, which has been proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and of which I, Paul, became a minister.

A Christian is guaranteed to progressively depart from iniquity. Those who do not “*continue in the faith, stable and steadfast*” are not true believers. Saving faith always continues and perseveres to the end. We are not saved because we continue, but *because* we are saved we continue grounded in the faith, persevering to the end. Perseverance in holiness is the quintessential mark of the indwelling Spirit of God. God is doing this work of sanctification in us. He knows those who are His, who are partakers of His divine nature and are sealed with His indwelling Holy Spirit. God’s work of progressive sanctification is the foundation the believer stands on. Progressive sanctification is the inevitable result not only of regeneration, but also of

the Spirit's indwelling. The Holy Spirit will guide the Christian "into all the truth" (John 16:13). The promise from God is: "And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules" (Ezekiel 36:27). God will cause every one of his born again children to "walk in His statutes." John describes this divine constraint again by quoting Isaiah 54:13, "And they will all be taught by God" (John 6:45). It is God's work from beginning to end, and to say that a person can be indwelt by God and have his nature and mind changed by God with little or no outward result gives the world (and many in the church) reason to blaspheme and distrust the name which is above all names.

God's Name Blasphemed Among Unbelievers

Shall we dirty the incomparable name of Christ into whose image the Father has promised to conform us? In Romans 2:24 Paul makes a devastating charge against the Pharisaical Jews who made an outward show but their hearts were far from God. Paul says: "*The name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you*". The Jews spoke highly of God. They had great words for God, but with their life they denied Him. Today as then, the result of this kind of teaching is that it fills the churches with religious hypocrites who cause the world to blaspheme God.

To blaspheme means to bring disrepute upon God's name and reputation. It is a breaking of the third commandment. Surely with our mouths we ought never to diminish the matchless worth of the name of God. Even more, with our lives, we must never degrade the trustworthiness of the Lord's promise to change a person's life. The carnal Christian teaching does not help the cause of Christ, but only hinders it. It leads us away

from God and minimizes sin. It brings disrepute to the reputation of God who said He would “*cause*” us to walk in His statutes (Ezekiel 36:26-27).

Turning the Grace of God into a License to Sin

The carnal Christian teaching turns the grace of God into a license to sin. Carnal Christianity teaches that a person will be justified upon conversion, but sanctification is optional. In other words, a person can be justified before God even though he may continue in sin. Jude warns us to avoid people who teach this doctrine.

Jude is writing against those who have professed to know Christ, and then say that God’s grace is so great that they do not have to change. They continue in sin and still claim to be saved. That is turning the grace of God into a license to sin. Jude exposes this very thing:

For certain people have crept in unnoticed who long ago were designated for this condemnation, ungodly people, who pervert the grace of our God into sensuality and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ (Jude verse 4).

It is important to notice that these men have crept in unawares. In other words, there were men that crept into the church of Jude’s day who were saying that you could be saved and live lasciviously. Their philosophy was that since God is such a merciful and forgiving God, then Christians can go on practicing a life of sin and God will grant forgiveness.

Shall We Continue in Sin?

Paul refutes this false doctrine in Romans 6:1-6:

What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it? Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved so sin.

Paul's conclusion is it is absurd to think that those who have been given a new nature, and have come to the end of the old nature, leaving that old way of life and crucifying it to the Cross—it would be absurd to think those people would *want* a license to sin. *God forbid! May it never be!* No, we are spiritually raised with Christ with a resurrected new nature. The body of sin is being destroyed “*so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin*”. Genuine Christians do not want a license to sin. Yet there are those who have crept in unawares to teach this doctrine of turning the grace of God into a license to sin.

How has it happened? The shepherds of the churches have accepted a man-centered version of Jesus that requires little or no commitment, sacrifice, fruit-bearing, or dying to self. The biblical Gospel is a miracle that changes self-loving and sin-loving people into God-centered people because of their transformed nature. Today, in many churches, believers are trained never to question a person's salvation even if they are living in ongoing sin. As long as they say they have committed their lives to Christ, it is implied that they have been genuinely saved. God

has enough power to save in this false Gospel, but He seems to lack the power to actually change a person’s life. The underlying philosophy of today in some churches is “come just as you are and stay as you are. Jesus loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life. He wants you to be happy and enjoy life!” God's Word and transforming power is trumpeted from the pulpit while it has little actual power in the people’s day to day lives. God’s grace has been turned into a license to sin. Let us not allow this kind of thinking to continue one moment more in our churches.



Jesus' Message to
Antinomians: Depart from
Me, I Never Knew You



*“...you hear so much about the carnal Christian...
That’s nonsense. That’s a theology that’s been cre-
ated to account for false professions.”*

R.C. SPROUL



Not long ago I was thumbing through an old Bible, and I discovered a poem written many long years ago by my wife's great grandmother, Caroline Isabel (Birky) Stutzman. The words she penned convey the urgency I think we need to have when handling this important subject. Grandma Caroline was born July 18, 1889, and yet these words are so strikingly relevant today. The poem is entitled "Is It True?"

You say you have accepted Christ
How wonderful, if it is really true.
But to be saved for long eternity
Christ too must have accepted *you*.
For the words of Christ are thus,
If you love Me My commandments you will keep,
Be sure Satan is not deceiving you
Truly many who thought they knew shall weep
For many souls are only deceived
And think to Christ they are true
But some day they shall hear His voice
"Depart from Me for *I* never knew *you*."

The carnal Christian doctrine is dangerous because it does not promote holiness and conformity to Christ, and for that reason Jesus Christ specifically condemned the very idea of it. Back in Matthew 7 we find that the one who claims to know Christ but lives a lawless life is in fact eternally condemned by the Lord Himself. The most frightening detail about our Lord's description is that all of the people described genuinely expect their eternal destiny will be heaven, but they are self-deceived. Until the Lord informs them that they are on their way to hell,

they are convinced they know Christ savingly. What they do not understand is that *He* has never known *them*.

Through the omniscient Lord, we here have an advance viewing of the most important day of anyone's life. On the Day of Judgment, many who were self-deceived will be shocked to find out that their eternal destination will be torment in the Lake of Fire. Jesus informs us:

Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?' And then will I declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness' (Matthew 7:21-23).

Almost every detail of this description is shocking. The word "*many*" is breathtaking. As we take a closer look at this multitude of people, we see people we are familiar with. These are not the atheists and the prostitutes and the drug dealers here. These are all—every one of them—church people. These are people filled with religious activity. These are people who have "*having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power*" (2 Timothy 3:5). The outward looked great, but inwardly they had no new nature and no indwelling Spirit, yet they still have assurance. We will see shortly that this assurance was a false assurance.

The Greatest Delusion

We come to a key point about the carnal Christian. They have a false assurance. A false or mistaken assurance is more

dangerous than serial killers, rabid dogs, or the AIDS virus. All of those things can only kill the body. False assurance will most definitely damn a person's everlasting soul. A. W. Tozer said, "Of all deceived persons the self-deceived are the least likely to discover the fraud".⁶⁷ It is one thing to be deceived about junk bonds or a mail-in sweepstakes. It is a whole different thing to be deluded about the destiny of your soul, thinking you are going to heaven when you will actually spend an eternity being tormented in hell.

Key Characteristics of the Self-Deceived

In his Bible study called *Empty Words*, John MacArthur gives five characteristics of someone who is self-deceived.⁶⁸

(1) Feelings and Experience Based

Is the person seeking feelings, blessings, experiences, healings, and miracles? This person is probably more interested in the by-products of the faith than the faith itself. He seeks what he can get, not what he can glorify God for. He is more interested in pampering himself than in exalting Christ.

(2) More Committed to Religion than Christ

Is the person more committed to a denomination, church, or organization than he is to the Word of God? That person's Christianity may be purely social. He's the kind who says, "I've been a Lutheran all my life," or "I'm a Presbyteri-

⁶⁷A. W. Tozer . *Man: The Dwelling Place of God* (Camp Hill, PA: WingSpread, 1997), 96.

⁶⁸ MacArthur also gives a slight warning. He says, "just because a person fits the description of one item on the list doesn't necessarily mean he is deceived. However, the things mentioned here are good indicators to go by."

an," or "I belong to that church." He's more committed to the organization than the Word of God.

(3) Studies Bible Merely Out of Academic Interest

Is the person involved in theology merely out of academic interest? You'll find this kind of person in colleges and seminaries. He studies theology, and writes books about it. Theology for him is an intellectual activity. His life is void of the righteousness of Christ.

(4) Lacks Theological Balance

Does the person seem stuck over one particular point of theology? This is the person who bangs the proverbial drum for his favorite topic. Sometimes the area he emphasizes is not that profound. He thinks he is close to God and has great divine insight that no one else has. All of his activity is devoted to seeking attention to feed his ego. Watch out for a person that has a lack of balance in his theology.

(5) Overindulgent in the Name of Grace

Is the person overindulgent in the name of grace? A person who lacks penitence and a contrite heart is self-deceived.⁶⁹

Jesus told us that both the wheat and the tares will “*grow together until the harvest*” (Matthew 13:30). He was of course speaking of the Day of Judgment, for he later went on to describe this great separation on that day:

Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. And he will place the

⁶⁹ John MacArthur. *Empty Words (Bible Study)*. Available online at: <http://www.gty.org/Resources/StudyGuides/398>.

sheep on his right, but the goats on the left (Matthew 25:32-33).

Only Christ can truly separate the self-deceived goats from the true sheep. Furthermore, self-deceived people are very difficult to spot for several reasons. Even though they are inwardly self-oriented, without the life of God in them, outwardly they have right words and outwardly righteous deeds.

They Know the Right Words

Those who are self-deceived are many times hard to detect because they know when and how to say all the right words. They say, "*Lord, Lord*". Because we cannot see into most people's personal lives, all we really know about a great majority of church members is what they tell us and what we see of them at church activities. Many have the right words without a changed heart. I'm amazed at how much of the Bible people can know, and how many sermons a person can hear, and yet it never deeply affects the way they live and how they spend their time. Jesus said to these people in Luke 6:46, "*Why do you call me 'Lord, Lord,' and not do what I tell you?*" Jesus Christ required *holiness* of all those who call Him Lord. All the theological knowledge in the world cannot make up for a lack of burning holiness in the heart.

They Perform Outwardly Righteous Deeds

The self-deceived will be people you least expect because self-deceived people are many times just as active in "spiritual" activity as true believers. According to Matthew 7:21-23, they preach, cast out devils, and are fervent in religious works. The

problem is, their life is divided, just as their tongue is divided. They truly have two masters. They are like Jeroboam who worshipped Baal and Asherah alongside Jehovah. Outside they can put on a convincing spiritual mask, but in the private life there is no meaningful walk with God, and there is evidence of a strong self-orientation instead of a Christ-orientation.

They base their salvation on something other than the fruit of the new nature and the assuring presence of the Holy Spirit. There are a multitude of people scattered throughout our churches who are at this moment deceived. What is giving them assurance of heaven even though they are without the Holy Spirit, enemies of God, and still dead in their sins?

Why Do the Self-Deceived Remain Deceived?

MacArthur again is helpful in his answer to this question. He points to three things: a false doctrine of assurance, a failure to examine oneself, and a fixation on religious activity.⁷⁰

A False Assurance

Let us first consider that many are living under the deception of a false assurance. Numbers of people are deceived because they get their assurance of salvation from man instead of from God. There is a serious heresy in the church today that says if you ask Jesus into your heart He will definitely save you. It is what some call “decisional regeneration”.⁷¹ It has become a tradition in many churches mainly in the last hundred years that if you ask God to save you and you sincerely mean it that

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ See Jay E. Adams pamphlet entitled “Decisional Regeneration” from the Chapel Library in Pensacola, Florida. It is available online free of charge at: <http://livingwatercc.org/resources/streams/1-27-08.pdf>

you will immediately experience regeneration. Certainly the Bible tells us if we call on the name of the Lord in repentant faith we will be saved. Repentant faith is the fruit of God's work in the heart. Jesus told Nicodemus "*Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God*" (John 3:3). God must do the work of calling and conviction in the heart before a man can believe. The man must be drawn by the Father or he is unable to come (John 6:44). The Bible nowhere teaches that man can or even has the ability to come whenever he decides to. Until we understand that the new birth is a miracle of God, we are going to continue to give people false assurance and seal their fate for hell.

A. W. Tozer hits the nail on the head concerning this point. He says:

Brethren, let's not forget that the new birth is a miracle—a major miracle! It is a vital and unique work of God in the human nature. Peter in describing it relates it to the miracle of Jesus Christ rising from the dead, "...[God] has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead." ...Just as surely as God's calling the world out of nothing was a major miracle, the work of God in making a believing Christian out of a sinner is a major miracle as well. In the light of what God is willing to do and wants to do, consider how we try to "get them in" in modern Christianity. We get them in any way we can. Then we try to work on them—to adjust them and to reform them.⁷²

⁷²A.W. Tozer. *I Call It Heresy!: And Other Timely Topics From First Peter*. (Camp Hill, PA: WingSpread, 1991), 30.

Metaphors of Regeneration

In order to understand that we cannot decide when a person is saved, let us be reminded of some of the metaphors of regeneration in the Bible. In these metaphors God is the active mover and miracle worker. These metaphors draw attention to the glory of God's grace to powerless sinners who cannot help themselves.

- Resurrection: In the new life raised from the dead (Ephesians 2:1-6; Ezekiel 37, i.e. "dry bones"), God brings the dead sinner to life.
- Rescue of an Abandoned Infant: In this rescue, the sovereign compassion of God is illustrated to sinners who are as helpless as an abandoned newborn (Ezekiel 16:6, "*And when I passed by you and saw you wallowing in your blood, I said to you in your blood, 'Live!' I said to you in your blood, 'Live!'* ").
- Birth: In the new birth (John 3:3; 1 Peter 1:23) God makes a new person by conceiving faith in the sinner by the Word of God.
- Metamorphosis: In the conversion of heart (Ezekiel 36:26-27; Deuteronomy 30:6) God transforms the heart of stone into a tender heart of flesh.
- Wineskins: In the new wineskins (Matthew 9:17) the new heart is able to handle the ever expanding illumination of Christ's doctrine (i.e. the new wine). When truth is illuminated, like old wineskins, the old heart does not hold it. A new wineskin must be given (representing the new heart).

- Harvest: In the miraculous increase of the harvest (1 Corinthians 3:6) Paul and Apollos plant and water, but it is God who gives the increase.
- Baptism: In Spirit baptism, the believer is newly immersed into Christ, united with Him spiritually and can therefore “*walk in newness of life*” (Romans 6:1-11; 1 Corinthians 12:13; Galatians 3:27).
- Creation: In the new creation (2 Corinthians 4:6; 5:17), God speaks and creates something out of nothing.

One of John Bunyan's favorite metaphors of regeneration was this new creation:

A blessed emblem of the Word of God is the matter of regeneration: for as the first chaos remained without form, and void, until the Spirit of God moved to work upon it, and by working, to put this world into frame and order; so man as he comes into the world abides a confused lump, an unclean thing; a creature without New Testament order, until by the Spirit of the Lord he is transformed into the image of Jesus Christ.⁷³

God must give life through His work of drawing and conviction before a person can respond in faith and repentance to the Gospel. This is the work of God. We need to also understand that regeneration does not happen mystically. It will take place only through the diligent planting and watering of the Word of God (1 Peter 1:23-24; 1 Corinthians 3:6-8). “*So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ*” (Romans 10:17).

Without that Gospel foundation, we are in danger of doing nothing more than making converts for hell. Instead of having

⁷³ John Bunyan. *Works of John Bunyan* (Banner of Truth: Carlisle, PA, 1991), 373.

the Lord as his counselor, the self-deceived person relies on any number of unreliable props. Many in our churches across the land are totally lost, and pastors and counselors tell them it is a sin to doubt their salvation. Their trust lies in a church counselor that told them they were saved; they might be trusting in a prayer, in their good behavior, in a baptism, or in an emotional experience instead of the Saviour who was crucified and risen in our place. No inward transformation of nature has taken place, but the person begins to feel better because of all the reforms that he is making in his life. Many times pride will even harden the heart, and the person will be almost flippant with an “of course I’m saved” attitude. This is a false understanding of assurance. Other times the person will doubt, but never tell anyone because of pride or ignorance or even confusion. When that doubt is voiced, it is often times squashed by others around him telling him not to doubt.

Biblically, no preacher or counselor can give assurance to anyone. It is a work of God the Holy Spirit. We all need to realize our only assurance which is found in Romans 8:15-16: “*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!’ The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God*”. God alone can give assurance that regeneration has actually taken place. When God seals the heart with the Holy Spirit, then we will know we are children of God and joint heirs with Christ, but not until then.

A Failure to Examine Oneself

Christ describes these self-deceived people as those that “*work iniquity*”, yet they did not see themselves this way. They saw themselves in a totally different way. They never examined

themselves. The phrase "*ye that work iniquity*" is one word: *anomial*. It is the same word where we get our word antinomial. It means those who are without the law or rule of Christ in their life. Christ's message to antinomians is (paraphrasing): "Get away from me you that do not have my Lordship ruling from within you." There is something that could turn the light on for the self-deceived. If they would stop all the activity and examine their heart and life, they might come to a knowledge that they actually have never experienced the new birth.

Self examination in the Bible is key to a proper biblical assurance. Paul encourages us to do this. Unlike some preachers today who almost discourage self examination, Paul recommended we do it:

Examine yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Or do you not realize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?—unless indeed you fail to meet the test!
(2 Corinthians 13:5).

One of the purposes of the Lord's Supper celebration is to give place for corporate and individual self examination. Paul says:

Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup (1 Corinthians 11:28).

In self examination, we are looking for the rule of the Spirit of God in our hearts. "Does Jesus Christ dwell in me?" is the question we ought to be asking. Christ says *only* those who do "*the will of my Father which is in heaven*" will enter into heaven. Those who pass from death to life have only one desire: to do the will of the Father. The only way to do the will of the Father in heaven is to have the divine nature, the new nature in

you, and to have the Spirit of God revealing the Word and will of God to you. In many places Paul explains that the Christian life is not just an outward conformity, but an inward conformity to Christ in your heart. Every Christian has spiritual perception at regeneration. Paul has quite a long and rich explanation of this in 1 Corinthians 2:7-14:

But we impart a secret and hidden wisdom of God, which God decreed before the ages for our glory. None of the rulers of this age understood this, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. But, as it is written, “What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love him”— these things [THE THINGS WHICH GOD PREPARED FOR US] God has revealed to us through the Spirit. For the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God. For who knows a person’s thoughts except the spirit of that person, which is in him? So also no one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might understand the things freely given us by God. And we impart this in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who are spiritual. The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned.

True Christians *know* and *do* the will of the Father because of the *new* nature in them and the Spirit of God in them that searches all things and reveals to us the “*deep things of God*”. Paul is clear to say that the natural man, or the person with only the old rebellious nature, cannot receive the things of the

Spirit of God. They are foolishness to him (1 Corinthians 2:14). Yet the natural man can surprisingly conform to an outward form of godliness that may look very similar to genuine Christianity, but *denying its power* (2 Timothy 3:5). He is a stranger to the power of the Holy Spirit ruling in his heart.

The antinomians (literally “lawless ones”) are those who have not done the will of the Father from the heart. It is not that they are not very moral people (as seen by their constant religious activity), but their greatest works are nothing more than filthy rags of self-righteousness (Isaiah 64:6, NKJV). These self-deceived church people are a law unto themselves. On the other hand, a Christian’s will is completely lost to Christ’s will. We lose our life and find our whole purpose in the life of another—in Christ alone! This is the new birth. The new nature has no agenda but Christ’s.

A Fixation on Religious Activity

The self-deceived never consider whether the will of Christ is ruling in their heart of hearts because they are too busy to examine themselves. Some have a real fixation on religious activity. MacArthur writes:

Some people think they are saved because they go to church, hear sermons, sing songs, read the Bible, and go to a Bible study or class. They are completely involved in religious activity. But that's a great illusion. There are many people like that in the church who are not saved. They are tares among the wheat (Matthew 13:24-30).⁷⁴

⁷⁴ John MacArthur. *Empty Words (Bible Study)*. Available online at: <http://www.gty.org/Resources/StudyGuides/398>.

What the lost, self-deceived religious person needs is to see whether or not he has the new birth. There is only one thing that can set man free from the slavery of his own heart. What is it? In Romans 8:2 Paul tells us what it is: *“For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death.”* What is the *“law of the Spirit of life...in Christ Jesus”*? It is the inward compulsion to obey God that comes from the Spirit of God in giving you a new heart and new life (cf. Ezekiel 36:26-27). Paul is referencing regeneration. God giving a new heart and new life will set a person free so that he will now not have to be a slave to the law (or compulsion) of sin within him.

We ought not teach the carnal Christian doctrine because it gives false comfort to those who do not know Christ. If we misunderstand what God is doing in salvation, not only justifying us but also sanctifying us, then we can give false hope to many who are completely lost.

Satan’s greatest deception is to make someone believe they are a Christian when they are not. We must be in the business of releasing people from their captivity to this deception. There have been decades of ministries that have led people into false conversions everywhere. Assurance is given by “praying this prayer” or by “walking this aisle”. They will say “Just raise your hand if you want Jesus as Saviour and repeat after me”. These false converts have made millions more like themselves and some of them are even put over the churches in leadership positions, including the pastorate. Many are on the wide road of destruction. The deceiving thing about the wide road, is that it is not labelled “Perdition Road”. The reason so many are on it, is that there are signs all over the road that say “This way to Heaven!” This is why our Lord warned about it. This is Satan's

greatest deception ever devised. Everything God does or makes, Satan counterfeits and imitates it in master deception.

The prophet Jeremiah had to deal with deceptive teachers who promised peace and safety when destruction was near. What would you think of someone telling a person dying of cancer that they are going to be ok when they are not? That would be cruel. That would be deceitful. Neither can we lie to those we love just because they have demonstrated some worldly sorrow for sin, and had a superficial faith in Jesus Christ. This is exactly what Jeremiah warns against in chapter 8 and verse 11, "*They have healed the wound of my people lightly, saying, 'Peace, peace,' when there is no peace.*" What does it mean to "*heal the hurt...slightly*". We would say today, "You have put a bandaid on a gaping wound that will cause death by saying, '*Peace peace, when there is no peace.*'" Let us not misunderstand God's work of justification and sanctification. A regenerate heart produces the fruit of holiness. We must not give false hope to people who do not have the fruit of a regenerated heart. Whoever God justifies, He sanctifies. Justification without sanctification is no salvation at all. We must not give false comfort to those who show no fruit of a new heart.

Christ's Message to Antinomians: I Never Knew You

Matthew 7:21 says we are going to be surprised about some church people on Judgment Day. There are those who have done all the things outwardly that Christians do, but have not lost their will to Christ's. They have not yet in their heart of hearts been able to say "*for me to live is Christ*" (Philippians 1:21). What Christ says is that on Judgment Day there may be

professing Christians there who are respectful of Christ, have the right doctrine, who have private devotions and public proclamation of the Gospel, but when they are examined by Christ they will be eternally lost because they have built a religious life of their own making instead of abandoning their will for Christ's. He will look at them and say—"you say you know Me! You trumpeted to all on earth that you knew Me. But *I never knew you! Your heart was never changed.* You were a law unto yourself. Get away from me you lawless, you antinomian—I never knew you!"



The Nature of Saving Faith



“Faith without works is dead being alone.”

THE APOSTLE JAMES



*W*hat is saving faith? We all rest on the verse “*Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved*” (Acts 16:31), but what is this belief? What is the nature of the faith that saves us? Multitudes have come to Christ for an important motive: they want their sins forgiven. Yet many who come do not want to forsake their sin. They come to Christ singing “Just as I am” and they want to stay as they are. At the center of the controversy surrounding saving faith is this question. Does saving faith change a person? I believe the Bible’s answer is yes. There is more to faith than simply knowing, there is believing which produces obedience.

False Faith

Belief is acted upon in the life. It is for this reason that I have proposed that the “carnal Christian” is no Christian at all because he has nothing more than a superficial faith. This kind of person is addressed in Scripture in many places. He is a “*hearer of the Word and not a doer*” (James 1:23). As Hebrews 6 says, he is the one who seems to superficially taste of Christianity, but falls away. He says he has faith, but he gives no evidence that God is working in him “*to will and to work for his good pleasure*” (Philippians 2:13).

A Dead, Demonic Faith

As James says, faith without the works of holiness that come from the indwelling Spirit is no faith at all—it is a dead faith (James 2:20). It is simply “*empty words*” (Ephesians 5:6). Even the devils have a superficial faith, and even in their superficial faith they tremble (James 2:19). Clearly true faith produces a holy life.

To my surprise, I have found that this idea is hotly contested in our churches. In fact, Charles Ryrie, a popular author in churches and seminaries today, teaches that to put any demands on faith is a works salvation. James Montgomery Boice answers Ryrie and gets to the heart of the issue:

Ryrie says, "The message of faith only and the message of faith plus commitment of life cannot both be the gospel; therefore, one of them is a false Gospel and comes under the curse of perverting the Gospel or preaching another Gospel (Gal. 1:6-9)."⁷⁵ But this argument fudges on the definition of true faith. If saving faith does not include trust or commitment, then to insist on trust or commitment is a false gospel. On the other hand, if faith includes trust and commitment, as the greatest theologians of the church have always claimed it does, then to insist on commitment is not to add to faith but only to insist that faith be true faith. That is a critical point, because a false faith, an imitation faith, or a dead faith will save no one.⁷⁶

The Heart is the Matter

The heart of the matter is a matter of the heart. Can we say that a person has true faith from a changed heart if his heart never motivates his behavior? The Puritan Thomas Brooks said it well:

There are those that have new heads but old hearts, new words but old wills, new expression but old affections, new memories but old minds, new motions but old conversations [ways of living].⁷⁷

⁷⁵ Charles C. Ryrie. *Balancing the Christian Life* (Moody: Chicago, 1973), 170.

⁷⁶ James Montgomery Boice. *What Happened to the Gospel of Grace?* (Good News Publishers: Wheaton, 2001), 143.

⁷⁷ Thomas Brooks. *The Complete Works, Vol. IV* (Edinburgh: James Nichol, 1867), 190.

The Bible clearly teaches that out of the heart flow the well-springs of life (Proverbs 4:23). Where a changed heart has begun, the river of a changed life will run!

Paul describes what counterfeit faith looks like. Speaking of the “*unbelieving*” Paul describes those with a false faith: “*They profess to know God, but they deny him by their works. They are detestable, disobedient, unfit for any good work*” (Titus 1:15-16).

True Faith Acts Differently Than Unbelief

Ignatius (35-117AD), friend of the Apostle Peter, disciple of the Apostle John, and the third bishop of the church at Antioch summed it up this way:

“The tree is known by its fruit.”⁷⁸ Similarly, those who profess to be Christ's will be recognized by their actions. For what matters is not a momentary act of professing, but being persistently motivated by faith.⁷⁹

He says again:

Carnal people cannot act spiritually, or spiritual people carnally, just as faith cannot act like unbelief, or unbelief like faith.⁸⁰

Ignatius makes it so plain. Faith and unbelief act oppositely. If a person is believing in Christ, he will evidence repentant faith in the actions of his life.

⁷⁸ Luke 6:44

⁷⁹ Cyril C. Richardson, ed. *Early Christian Fathers* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), 92.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 90.

So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead. But someone will say, "You have faith and I have works." Show me your faith apart from your works, and I will show you my faith by my works (James 2:17-18).

The person with saving faith is united to the Spirit of God. *"But he who is joined to the Lord becomes one spirit with him"* (1 Corinthians 6:17). One who is joined unto the Lord acts differently than one who is controlled by *"the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience"* (Ephesians 2:2).

The Object of Faith

Perhaps this point is self-evident, but I will state it since the entirety of false professors miss saving faith because of this one eternally important matter. Faith always has an object. The object of Christian faith is Jesus Christ. *"looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith"* (Hebrews 12:2, NKJV). God commands us to look to Him. *"Turn to me and be saved, all the ends of the earth! For I am God, and there is no other"* (Isaiah 45:22). *"And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life"* (John 3:14-15). Paul states plainly: *"Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved"* (Acts 16:31). The object of our faith is not the sinner's prayer, going forward at a Gospel invitation, baptism, our faithfulness to evangelism, a pastor, or a church, or any other religious activity. The object of our faith is the Person of Jesus Christ. It is appropriating His death for me personally that saved me. He says *"Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest"* (Matthew 11:28). Saving faith clings to its object: the Person of

Jesus Christ. It embraces all that He is as God and Redeemer, and all that He has done as the propitiation for our sins. Our faith leads us to see Jesus Christ, the one whom Isaiah saw high and lifted up on the throne (Isaiah 6, cf. John 12:41), and the one who was lifted up on a cross to satisfy God's wrath for our sins.

Tyndale's Description of Saving Faith

William Tyndale (1494-1536), martyr and translator of the Bible into the modern English language was resolute that true faith is always followed by the fruit of good works. In his preface to Paul's Epistle to the Romans, he gives this commentary about what a living faith looks like:

Faith is then a lively and steadfast trust in the favour of God, wherewith we commit ourselves altogether unto God, and that trust is so surely grounded and sticketh so fast in our hearts, that a man would not once doubt of it, though he should die a thousand times therefore. And such trust wrought by the holy ghost through faith, maketh a man glad, lusty, cheerful and true-hearted unto God and to all creatures. By the means whereof, willingly and without compulsion he is glad and ready to do good to every man, to do service to every man, to suffer all things, that God may be loved and praised, which hath given him such grace: so that it is impossible to separate good works from faith, even as it is impossible to separate heat and burning from fire.⁸¹

So is Tyndale right? Is it impossible to separate faith from what faith produces, namely good works? As we look through

⁸¹ William Tyndale. "Prologue to the Book of Romans," *New Testament* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996, reprint—originally published in 1534), 212-213.

the Scriptures, we will see that this is true. Tyndale was right. Saving faith is one that not only calls Jesus Lord, but actually finds joy in doing what He has commanded.

The Faith that Saves is Never Alone

True faith is the conviction of heart that those things which are not seen are true, and it causes a person to live differently. “*But, as it is written, ‘What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love him’— these things **God has revealed to us through the Spirit***” (1 Corinthians 2:9-10). No human eye has seen the new heaven and earth that God has prepared for us. No eye has seen the things of the heavenly kingdom, but God has given us eyes to see them through His Spirit. With this kingdom always before our hearts, the Spirit causes us to live differently and to “*seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness*” (Matthew 6:33). The living differently saves no one. The living in fear of God and holiness prove that faith is present. Jesus asked, “*Why do you call me ‘Lord, Lord,’ and not do what I tell you?*” (Luke 6:46). If we believe Christ is Lord we will live with Him as Lord of our life. As John Calvin said, “While it is true that we are saved by faith alone, the faith that saves is never alone”.⁸² In other words, we are saved by faith alone, but true faith produces good works. The good works do not save us; they are the proof that our heart believes God. An apple does not make an apple tree an apple tree. An apple is proof that the apple tree is an apple tree. Neither do good works make a person a Christian. Holy Spirit motivated good works are proof that a person is a Christian.

⁸² Mike Mason. *The Gospel According to Job* (Wheaton, IL: Good News Publishers, 2002), 82.

Obedient Faith

Charles Spurgeon said, “Although we are sure that men are not saved for the sake of their works, yet we are equally sure that no man will be saved without them.”⁸³ Authentic faith is always demonstrated by obedience to God.

It is not that forsaking sin and obeying God saves a person. Repentance is simply a sign that the guilty sinner sees sin as God sees it and has true saving faith. This faith is demonstrated by a turning from idols to the living God—in short—obedience. Faith and obedience are wedded in the New Testament. Consider John 3:36, “*Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him.*” The New Testament writers often speaks of the “*obedience of faith*” (Romans 1:5, 16:26) and equate faith as identical with obedience (Acts 5:32, 6:7; Romans 10:16; Hebrews 11:8; 2 Thessalonians 1:8). Peter asks: “*what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God?*” (1 Peter 4:17). Paul says in Romans 15:18, “*For I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me to bring the Gentiles to obedience—by word and deed*”. Peter speaks of believing the Gospel as “*obeying the truth through the Spirit*” (1 Peter 1:22, NKJV).

Clearly saving faith has some kind of evidence of obedience in the life. What a glorious thing it is to have a faith that sees God so clearly that we flee from this world and the wrath to come upon it!

⁸³ Charles Haddon Spurgeon. *The New Park Street Pulpit, Volume 4* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1963 reprint), 245

Was Blind But Now I See

Faith is the spiritual sight of something that cannot be seen with your physical eyes. This is how Hebrews 11 defines faith. *“Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen”* (Hebrews 11:1). When Paul prays for the Ephesian believers’ faith to increase, he says, *“I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened”* (Ephesians 1:18 NASB). In speaking of people’s unbelief, Jesus speaks of this spiritual condition as blindness: *“their eyes they have closed”* (Matthew 13:15). And of those with faith, He says, *“...blessed are your eyes, for they see, and your ears, for they hear”* (Matthew 13:16). Paul’s mission from Christ was *“to open their eyes, so that they may turn from darkness to light”* (Acts 26:18). The Scripture says that Lydia was listening and the *“Lord opened her heart to pay attention to what was said by Paul”* (Acts 16:14). John Newton put it this way: *“Amazing grace! How sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me! I once was lost, but now am found; was blind, but now I see”*.

We are moved by what we see. This is so elementary that I find it strange that controversy exists. For example, if I am on the railroad tracks and I see a train coming, my faith in the reality of sudden death upon impact motivates me to flee from my present location. I see the train, therefore I run away from the train. Put a person without sight and hearing on the train tracks, and he will not move. He will not sense the urgency.

The classic passage which proves that saving faith is obedient faith is James 2.

So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead. But someone will say, “You have faith and I have works.” Show me your faith apart from your works, and I will show you my faith by my works. You believe that God is one; you do

well. Even the demons believe—and shudder! Do you want to be shown, you foolish person, that faith apart from works is useless? Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up his son Isaac on the altar? You see that faith was active along with his works, and faith was completed by his works; and the Scripture was fulfilled that says, Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness”—and he was called a friend of God. You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone. And in the same way was not also Rahab the prostitute justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out by another way? For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, so also faith apart from works is dead. (James 2:17-26).

Two people are named as examples of saving faith: the patriarch Abraham, and Rahab the Gentile harlot (and the great, great grandmother of King David).

The Salvation Testimony of Rahab

Had not Rahab feared God from her heart, she never would have been saved. How do we know she put her faith in the Lord? We know only through the obedience of her faith. Her gracious protection of the Hebrew spies manifested a changed heart. She further showed her faith by gathering her family into her house and putting that scarlet chord in her window. Listen to her own salvation testimony:

I know that the Lord has given you the land, and that the fear of you has fallen upon us, and that all the inhabitants of the land melt away before you. For we have heard how the Lord dried up the water of the Red Sea before you when you came out of Egypt, and what you did to the two kings of the Amorites who were beyond the Jordan, to Sihon and Og,

whom you devoted to destruction. And as soon as we heard it, our hearts melted, and there was no spirit left in any man because of you, for the Lord your God, he is God in the heavens above and on the earth beneath (Joshua 2:9-11).

It was a scarlet chord that was the sign that Rahab and her house would be safe when Joshua came to destroy Jericho. Clement wrote of this account to the Corinthian church around 96AD:

By this [scarlet thread] they made it clear that it was by the blood of the Lord that redemption was going to come to all who believe in God and hope on him.⁸⁴

Of this account, James asks, “*was not Rahab the harlot justified by works*”? What a strange statement this is if it is taken out of context. Yet it is true. Are we not justified by faith alone? The answer is yes. But it is a living, active faith that motivates us unto good works. James explains, “*For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, so also faith apart from works is dead*” (James 2:26). James’ point is that we are justified by a living faith—a faith that evidences itself through a changed life, just like Rahab—and just like Abraham.

The Example of Abraham

Abraham is the quintessential example of Romans 4 and James 2 as to what faith is and how true faith functions. The point of Romans 4 is that it is faith alone that justifies. The point of James 2 is that the faith that justifies is never alone.

⁸⁴ Cyril C. Richardson, ed. *Early Christian Fathers* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), 49.

Paul says in Galatians 3:7, “*Know then that it is those of faith who are the sons of Abraham.*”

God promised Abraham a seed even though Sarah was old and barren. Abraham had no hope that Sarah would produce a child naturally, but when he was told by God that Sarah herself would conceive, he believed. Though he laughed at first, he believed God and chose to obey Him by initiating the covenant sign of circumcision, representing that God would indeed bring the promised seed through him and Sarah. Abraham was so confident in God’s promise to raise up a nation through his son, that Abraham was willing to sacrifice Isaac believing that God could raise him from the dead (Hebrews 11:17-19).

Believers have the same faith as Abraham. The believer sees no way to save himself but to trust in the Cross work of Jesus Christ (Romans 3:22). He looks to the grace of God, believing that he will be accepted by God because of the work of Christ on the sinner’s behalf.

Works cannot save, or give any merit toward our salvation (Ephesians 2:8-9). Keeping the Law will not do. Works righteousness only condemns us further (Romans 3:20; cf. Isaiah 64:6). In fact the purpose of the Law is not to justify but to show our condemnation that we might run to Christ for mercy (Romans 3:19-20; Galatians 3:24). Good works however are the product of genuine saving faith (Ephesians 2:10). In other words, we are not saved *by* good works, but *for* good works. Abraham persevered in good works. He circumcised himself and went to the promised land as he was commanded. He offered his son Isaac to God believing he would be raised from the dead (Hebrews 11:19). In the same way, God’s new creation (the believer) is created for the purpose of doing good works, reflect-

ing God's glory as God's representative so that others will glorify God (Matthew 5:16).

This is the sentiment of every believer, as it was for Martin Luther. He saw faith working out a joyful obedience from the heart:

Although I am an unworthy and condemned man, my God has given me in Christ all the riches of righteousness and salvation without any merit on my part, out of pure, free mercy, so that from now on I need nothing except faith which believes that this is true. Why should I not therefore freely, joyfully, with all my heart, and with an eager will do all things which I know are pleasing and acceptable to such a Father who has overwhelmed me with his inestimable riches?⁸⁵

Forsaking All Others

Think of it this way. Imagine what it would be like for a woman on her wedding day to hear her spouse say these words: "I, Mr. So and so, take you my Miss Thus and so to be my lawfully wedded wife. I promise to remain faithful to you on Sundays only. I refuse to forsake all former lovers, choosing rather to cling to them and meet with them throughout the week."

It would be absurd to accept a marriage vow that was good for only one day out of the week! And yet, that is exactly how many professing believers treat the Lord—the Heavenly Bridegroom.⁸⁶ The proof that you are born again is not your words, but that you genuinely love the Lord in your heart of hearts so much that you *forsake* all others. You treasure the Lord and forsake anything that would take His place. You turn from idols

⁸⁵ Martin Luther. "The Freedom of a Christian" from the *Works of Martin Luther* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1960), 304 (originally published in 1520).

⁸⁶ David Ravenhill. From the Foreword of Steve Gallagher's *Intoxicated with Babylon* (Dry Ridge, KY: Pure Life Ministries, 2001), 10.

to serve your living Lord because God has given you a heart that treasures Him. The new heart produces faithful desires and motivations which result in faithful living.



True Christians View Sin Differently than the Unconverted



“You can no more separate justification from sanctification than you can separate the circulation of the blood from the inhalation of the air.”

ARCHIBALD ALEXANDER HODGE



The carnal Christian teaching does not take into account that a Christian views sin *differently* than an unbeliever. A person with a new nature—a Christian (who is a *new* creation in Christ) now has a *new* hungering and thirsting. In other words, his hungering and thirsting is for righteousness. He didn't have that before. Job 15:16 says it right when he asks the question, "*How much more abominable and filthy is man, which drinketh iniquity like water?*" By contrast a true believer has a new appetite. Charles Spurgeon summed up the point of this entire chapter when he said:

If you can sin and not weep over it, you are an heir of hell. If you can go into sin, and afterwards feel satisfied to have done so, you are on the road to destruction. If there are no prickings of conscience, no inward torments, no bleeding wounds; if you have no throbs and heavings of a bosom that cannot rest; if your soul never feels filled with wormwood and gall when you know you have done evil, you are no child of God.⁸⁷

A saved person has a new Lord. The new heart exalts Jesus Christ. The ultimate goal and chief end of a Christian is God Himself. Sin is a distraction and a grievance to a Christian. He hates sin because it gets in the way of his ultimate desire, which is Christ.

Furthermore, the Father's love is so great for His children, that He will never leave them to continue in their sin. The Puritan Jeremiah Burroughs (b. 1599)⁸⁸ in his book *Spots of the Godly and of the Wicked* makes this very point:

⁸⁷ Charles Spurgeon. *Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit, Volume 13*, Sermon 780, "The Secret Spot" (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1867), 634.

⁸⁸ Burroughs, born in 1599, was a Puritan believer in England. Because of fierce persecution then for the Gospel, he had to flee the country and lived in Rotterdam, Holland.

Mark this: the great fruit of the love of Jesus Christ is to sanctify a soul and therefore it is a matter of great consequence. Christ shows His love in a special manner in sanctifying and cleansing the soul. This is from the peculiar and electing love of God. And it shows that when Christ comes to cleanse the soul from spots and defilements, that He had loved that soul from all eternity.

On the contrary, if the Lord lets you lie in the filth of your sin, it is an argument that He never set his heart on you. As for instance, suppose a man were driving on the road, and sees a child there lying in the deep mud and filth, ready to be choked with the dirt and mire, and to perish there. Well, as he is riding by, he looks on the child, and sees it ready to perish. And when he has looked upon it, away he goes and leaves it there. Would not every person say, "Certainly this is not the father of the child that rides away." Now if the father or mother should come by, and see the child, the mother would screech out, "O my child!" and go and rescue the child to carry it away. She would get water to wash it, and cleanse the child. In this, the mother and father show their love to the child. In this same way is the manner of the love of Christ. Christ sees all your filthiness and pollution. He sees men and women wallowing up and down in the dirt. Christ looks upon them, and goes by, leaves them still, and lets them wallow in their corruptions more and more, and passes by. Surely the heart of Christ is not inclined towards them and there is little relation that Christ or God has to such as these. But now, when there is one that belongs to Jesus Christ, and that Christ has set His love on them from eternity, He sees them wallowing in the filth of sin. The very bowels of Christ do yearn for that soul. O! Christ takes them, and with His own blood cleanses them, and will never leave washing and

cleansing their soul until He has cleansed it from all its spots, and presented it before the Father.⁸⁹

The Chief End of the Christian

Missionary David Brainerd expressed the desire that comes from the regenerated heart well. He said, “I never feel comfortably, but when I find my soul going forth after God: if I cannot be holy, I must necessarily be miserable forever.”⁹⁰ The ultimate goal of a Christian is to be conformed entirely to the image of the Lord Jesus Christ. His ultimate delight is Christ Himself. Look at Philippians 3:8. Here in this chapter Paul details all the things he delighted in before Christ—his dignified family, his education, his religion, and all his good works. Now that he is saved, he admits this was all dung! It was all worthless. Consider Philippians 3:8-10:

Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith— that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death

⁸⁹ Jeremiah Burroughs. *Spots of the Godly and of the Wicked* (Puritan Publications: Coconut Creek, FL, 2007) 115-116.

⁹⁰ Jonathan Edwards. *Memoirs of the Rev. David Brainerd: Missionary to the Indians on the Borders of New-York, New-Jersey, and Pennsylvania: Chiefly Taken from His Own Diary* (Oxford University Press: Oxford, UK, 1818), 106.

A Christian's ultimate desire is Christ. All else is a hindrance and a distraction. His earnest desire and hunger is for Christ. Without this holiness, this mark of regeneration, no man will see the Lord. Hebrews 12:14 tells us this and adds that we should "follow" after this holiness. The word "*follow*" indicates "an earnest pursuit" or a "zealous striving after".⁹¹ This pursuit of holiness is the *fruit* of the new heart. It is manifested in a transformed life. Because of the new nature, the ultimate pursuit of the Christian becomes God Himself, and sin is only a grievance and a distraction.

The Lost Person's Ultimate Desire

On the other hand, the ultimate desire of a non-Christian is to please himself. He is constantly sinning in his own self-love and self-idolatry. Those with an old nature may go to church and memorize the Bible and say that they love God, but in their heart, they are satisfied with sin. Unlike true Christians, God's commandments are grievous to them (1 John 5:3). Yet they continue on trying to cover their iniquity with human good works. John 3:19, "*people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil.*" Any covering is fine. Again, Jeremiah Burroughs does an excellent job describing the innate wickedness of those who have only the sinful nature within them:

...sin in a wicked man defiles all his actions, so as to make his very actions, the best of his actions, to be turned into sin. While you are an unregenerate man, your sin is of such a contagious nature, that it makes all your actions sin. Even your best

⁹¹ Gerhard Kittel; Geoffrey William Bromiley; Gerhard Friedrich. *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*. electronic ed. (Eerdmans: Grand Rapids, MI, 1964-c1976), 2:230

actions turn to sin. In Psalm 109:7 the text says, “Let his prayer become sin.” All your actions before God are sinful, even your best actions, while you are an unregenerate man. There is not only sin in them, but that sin has so defiled them that they even become sin to you. Out of an unclean thing there cannot proceed that which is clean. Out of a corrupt tree there cannot be any good fruit. Now, there is nothing but the fruits of sin that come from an unregenerate heart.⁹²

The natural man is so far from seeking God’s glory that even his good deeds are as “*filthy rags*” (Isaiah 64:6, NKJV). A natural man may be religious, know his Bible, speak about God, but he cannot please God, because his ultimate desire is to please himself. David Brainerd put it well:

Oh, how amazing it is that people can talk so much about men's power and goodness; when, if God did not hold us back every moment, we should be devils incarnate!⁹³

Richard Sibbes agrees that the chief end of the non-Christian is that he might have the full pleasures of his own sin.

The carnal heart of man is a poisonous thing, and hates God naturally. It wishes that there were no God to judge him. He may think well of God for the good things of this life, but when he thinks of God as a judge to cast him into hell, he wisheth with all his heart, Oh that there were no God! that I might have my full of the pleasures of sin.⁹⁴

⁹² Jeremiah Burroughs. *Spots of the Godly and of the Wicked* (Puritan Publications: Coconut Creek, FL, 2007) 125.

⁹³ Jonathan Edwards. *Memoirs of David Brainerd*, 98.

⁹⁴ Richard Sibbes, D.D. *The Complete Works of Richard Sibbes, Volume 6* (Edinburgh: James Nichol, 1863), 842.

Burroughs goes on to contrast the difference between the sin of the saved and the sin of the lost by comparing them to a sick man and a dead man:

There is a great deal of difference between a sickly countenance of a weak man, and the ghastly countenance of a dead carcass. There is a great deal of difference between the stiffness in a man's joints, or in his flesh, by reason of some cold, and the stiffness in a body lying by the burial walls. There is a great deal of difference between some breakings out of your children, breakings out of fever or other sickness, and the filthy corruption that is in a dead carcass or that breaks out there. The saints, though they have sin in them, yet they have a principle of life that works out that sin that is in them. Now the ungodly, they have sin, but they have *no principle of life to work it out.*⁹⁵

Four Evidences of Genuine Spiritual Life

Burroughs lists four evidences of spiritual life which are in all people who have experienced the radical transformation of the new birth. His specific point is that these evidences manifest themselves even when Christians fall into sin. They are (1) a divine accountability in the heart, (2) a desire to please God, (3) a deep affection for the saints, and (4) an earnest longing for the comfort of the Spirit. Let us consider them briefly.

(1) A Divine Accountability in the Heart

Spiritually alive people have a divine accountability residing within them that chastens them when they fall in to sin. They have been sealed with the impression of holiness from God's Spirit. A spiritually alive person cannot get away from the

⁹⁵ Ibid., 127.

Word of God that the Spirit has written on his heart. When he sins, his heart and mind are filled with conviction. Certainly a true Christian can grieve the Holy Spirit of God, but the Spirit continues to work in a disciplining manner. Comfort and joy are taken away while the Christian goes through divine chastening.

A Christian may sin, but he will not live to sin. He cannot keep on sinning as a practice because he has a spiritual sensitivity about him. The regenerated person is given eyes to see the darkness of sin, ears to hear the blasphemy of sin, a nose to smell the stench of sin, and a heart to feel hatred for sin. The regenerated soul through his new senses now understands the corruption that dwells within, and is taught by God to loath and hate his old way of life. Therefore, though he battles against sin every moment, sin cannot dominate as a practice. It remains, but it does not *reign*.

Whether through joy or chastening, the Christian's heart is never far away from the fact that He is living in the indwelling presence of God and will soon see His Maker, Judge, and Redeemer "*face to face*" on that Day of Redemption (Ephesians 1:13-14, 4:30; 1 Corinthians 13:12).

(2) A Desire to Please God

Spiritually alive people have at their core a desire to please God, and therefore hate any sin that besets them. Even though the impulsion to sin is "*waging war against*" our new nature, Christians "*delight in the law of God, in [their] inner being*" (Romans 7:22-23). Every Christian has at his very core, the desire to please God. He says with Paul, "*So whether we are at home or away, we make it our aim to please him*" (2 Corinthians 5:9). The true believer can say with Paul, "*For to me to live*

is Christ” (Philippians 1:21). When sin overtakes the Christian, he says with Paul, “*Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?*” (Romans 7:24). Paul goes even further in Romans 8:11. With dramatic and persuasive speech, he assures Christians that God will quicken the Christian with the same power that raised Christ from the dead to depart from sin and return to God.

When a Christian is restored, he hates sin all the more. He becomes a watchman concerning sin and warns others of the pits and traps and snares of the flesh and the devil. He says with David, “*Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and uphold me with a willing spirit. Then I will teach transgressors your ways, and sinners will return to you*” (Psalm 51:12-13). As a person who unwittingly touches a hot stove, the Christian burned by sin warns others who pass by that way.

Sin may derail and distract and grieve the Christian temporarily, but his ultimate desire is to know and love and please God.

(3) A Deep Affection for the Saints

Spiritually alive people have a deep affection and respect for all the saints and look to them for help in restoration when they have fallen. Our Lord gave us this evidence when he said, “*By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another*” (John 13:35). He says again, “*Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another ... if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us*” (1 John 4:11, 12).

This deep affection for each other comes from the One who has united us in Him: there is a oneness among all true children of God. When one falls all weep and strive for his reconciliation.

Jesus prayed as much saying, “*that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me*” (John 17:21). A true Christian will humble himself and esteem the saints when sin overtakes him. On the other hand, I have seen false converts charge the entire church with hypocrisy and stand upon that for their reason for falling away in sin. This is not the fruit of a true believer. I have dealt with many saints and many sinners as a pastor. True saints when confronted with their sin do not “shoot the messenger” but will melt with a tender heart that they could sin in such a way, as David did in Psalm 51. I have seen many, many saints weep in my office over their sin and thank me for bringing it to their attention.

(4) An Earnest Longing for the Ministry of the Spirit

Spiritually alive people have an earnest desire for the Spirit to minister to their spirit. Paul says, “*you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, ‘Abba! Father!’ The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God*” (Romans 8:15b-16). The Christian hungers and thirsts after the comfort and joy that comes from the Spirit’s revelation of truth to his soul. This is why there is such a hunger for the Word of God. Just as the empty tummy is satisfied with a good meal, so there is great comfort that comes when taking in the “*deep things of God*” through the Spirit and the Word. This longing continues in him even when he has fallen into sin. He does not prefer the company of the ungodly. Burroughs explains:

...take one that had true godliness in him, though he is very foully fallen, perhaps into some gross sins, yet he is able to taste

the difference to some degree. He can taste a difference between a godly ministry and foul ministry. He can taste between godly company and foul company, between the spirit of one man, and the spirit of another. I say, he will not wholly lose his favor [spiritual perception], but still he has some kind of favor [spiritual perception], to taste a difference between that that is spiritual, and carnal, and especially in the ministry of the word. In the reading or preaching of the Word he finds some favor in that. If he was ever converted, it was a spiritual work of the Word that converted him, and there is some seed of it remaining in his heart. This is the same which is said of the Holy Ghost by the Apostle Saint Peter in 1 Peter 1:25, “The word of the Lord endureth for ever; and this is the word which by the Gospel is preached to you...he is speaking of the Word of God on the hearts of the saints. There is a spiritual seed which is planted by the efficacy of the Word of God that first begot the soul and that certainly abides forever. There is no one who falls off so badly that loses that principle. Rather, they always have some seed of the spiritualness of God’s Word abiding in their hearts, which enables them to favor God’s Word.”⁹⁶

There is a difference in how a Christian views sin and how a non-Christian views it. When a Christian sins, He is all the more compelled by the Holy Spirit to holy living because he sees the disgrace of sin. The Christian lives a Christ-focused, and Christ-obsessed life. A non-Christian, no matter how religious or moral he may be, lives a self-focused life. The goals of the heart are different because one has been changed and transformed and one does not.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 132-133.



What About the Sins of the Old Testament Saints?



“When we look at the Old Testament saints, we ought never to use them as excuses, because our standard is so much higher now that the Sun of Righteousness has risen.”



I recently read an online defense of the carnal Christian teaching. The man was adamant that to teach that a person must actually turn from their sin in order to be saved is simply a works salvation. It astounded me, as the reception of the Gospel requires repentance (a change of mind that produces a turning from sin) and faith (a turning to God). Paul rejoiced that the Thessalonian church had “*turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God*” (1 Thessalonians 1:9).

Not surprisingly, this man’s first line of defense was to turn to the Old Testament saints. He said:

...the Bible is filled with believers who sinned horribly; such as, Noah, Lot, Jacob, Judah, Samson, David, Solomon, Jonah....⁹⁷

This is a typical argument for those who want to defend the carnal Christian doctrine.

The Standard for the New Testament Saint is Higher

We must emphasize that the first line of defense for those who have little desire for holiness and want to excuse their sin, is to use the Old Testament saints as examples. What a blunder is made here, especially when we have the blazing glorious light of Christ in the New Testament where we are called to “*follow in his steps*” (1 Peter 2:21). The standard of holiness for the New Testament saint is so much higher than the Old for several reasons: (1) Satan is more limited in hindering the Gospel than he was in the Old Testament, (2) Christ’s coming into the world has allowed people to see the Gospel more clearly, (3) we have

⁹⁷ David J. Stewart. Online presentation at <http://www.Jesus-is-Savior.com>.

the completed New Testament Scriptures, which Old Testament saints never had, and (4) the power of God has been poured out unto all nations through the Holy Spirit's ministry beginning at Pentecost.

The Strong Man is Limited in the New Testament

First, the wicked one was bruised and bound at the cross, so that he cannot deceive the nations in the same manner as before Christ's coming. To be sure, he still roams around like a lion "*seeking someone to devour*" (1 Peter 5:8). Speaking of Satan, our Lord said in Mark 3:27, "*But no one can enter a strong man's house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man. Then indeed he may plunder his house.*" Through the Cross, Christ limited Satan so that He could "*proclaim liberty to the captives...to set at liberty those who are oppressed*" (Luke 4:18). Christ came to "*bind the strong man*" and to "*destroy the works of the devil*" (1 John 3:8). This is one reason times in the Old Testament were much darker, even for the saints.

The Brightness of Christ's Coming into the World

Second, after the bright dawn of Christ's first advent, we can see much more clearly when compared to the night of the Old Testament. Surely the saints under the old covenant could see, but only as by the dim lit moon and the stars of the prophecies and promises. They stumbled more severely in the Old Testament because of this night. When we look at the Old Testament saints, we ought never to use them as excuses, because our standard is so much higher now that the Sun of Righteousness has risen (Malachi 4:2). With Christ's entrance into the

world came an age of miracles. God bore witness to the apostles and the early church “*by signs and wonders and various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will*” (Hebrews 2:4). Jonathan Edwards wrote in his famous work, *A Dissertation on the End for Which God Created the World* that the unveiling of Christ in His fullness had finally arrived with His incarnation. “Now these glorious mysteries, which were in a great measure kept secret from the foundation of the world, are clearly revealed (Ephesians 3:3–5, Romans 16:25).”⁹⁸ “[T]he mystery hidden for ages and generations but now revealed to his saints” (Colossians 1:26). Edwards sees the present age as one in which we have “the light of perfect day” concerning Christ and the Gospel:

Thus we see how the light of the gospel, which began to dawn immediately after the fall, and gradually increased through all the ages of the Old Testament, is now come to the light of perfect day, as the brightness of the sun shining forth in his unvailed glory.⁹⁹

The New Testament Scriptures

We ought to marvel and fear that in the moral darkness of the world before Christ the Old Testament saints could still be so godly. Godly Josiah was regenerated at age eighteen, and he immediately began cleansing the countryside of idolatry, even though he did not even discover the Word of God (quite probably only the five books of Moses) in the Temple until eight years later!¹⁰⁰ For most of the Old Testament saints, the only revela-

⁹⁸Jonathan Edwards. “A Dissertation on the End for Which God Created the World”. *The Works of Jonathan Edwards, Volume 1*. Bellingham, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 2008), 587.

⁹⁹Ibid.

¹⁰⁰To read Josiah’s story see 2 Kings 22:1-23:30; 2 Chronicles 34:1-35:27.

tion they had was the first five books of the Bible, and even then since there were no printing presses, most likely had only hand written portions. Saints in the New Testament on the other hand witnessed miracles and in a very short time after Christ's resurrection had copies of some of the New Testament books, with the canon being generally accepted by approximately 170 AD as seen by the catalog of New Testament books listed on the Muratorian fragment.¹⁰¹ The key passage on this theme in Edwards' book is expressed so clearly, I include it in its entirety:

Thus the Sun of righteousness, after it is risen, begins to shine forth clearly, and not by a dim reflection as before.— Christ, before his death, revealed many things more clearly than ever they had been in the Old Testament: but the great mysteries of Christ's redemption, reconciliation by his death, and justification by his righteousness, were not so plainly revealed before Christ's resurrection. Christ gave this reason for it, that he would not put new wine into old bottles; and it was gradually done even after his resurrection. In all likelihood, Christ much more clearly instructed them personally after his resurrection, and before his ascension; as we read that he continued with them forty days, speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom, Acts 1:3. and that "he opened their understandings, that they might understand the scriptures," Luke 24:45. But the clear revelation of these things was principally after the pouring out of the Spirit on the day of Pentecost, agreeable to Christ's promise, John 16:12, 13. "I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now. Howbeit, when the Spirit of truth is come, he shall guide you into all truth." This clear revelation of the mysteries of the gospel, as they are delivered, we have chiefly through the hands

¹⁰¹ Walter A. Elwell. *Tyndale Bible Dictionary* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2001), 173.

of the apostle Paul, by whose writings a child may come to know more of the doctrines of the gospel, in many respects, than the greatest prophets knew under the darkness of the Old Testament.¹⁰²

The Power of Pentecost Continues Today

When the day of Pentecost arrived, they were all together in one place. And suddenly there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. And divided tongues as of fire appeared to them and rested on each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance. Now there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men from every nation under heaven. And at this sound the multitude came together, and they were bewildered, because each one was hearing them speak in his own language...

But Peter, standing with the eleven, lifted up his voice and addressed them: "Men of Judea and all who dwell in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and give ear to my words. For these people are not drunk, as you suppose, since it is only the third hour of the day. But this is what was uttered through the prophet Joel: "And in the last days it shall be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit on your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams; even on my male servants and female servants in those days I will pour out my Spirit, and they shall prophesy..."

"Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs that God did through him in your midst, as you

¹⁰²Edwards. "End for Which God Created the World", 587.

yourselfes know— this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men. God raised him up, loosing the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it...

This Jesus God raised up, and of that we all are witnesses. Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this that you yourselves are seeing and hearing...Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified.” Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, “Brothers, what shall we do?” And Peter said to them, “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:1-6, 14-18, 22-24, 32-33, 36-38).

A cataclysmic spiritual shift took place in the world at Pentecost that holds New Testament saints to a much higher standard than Old Testament saints. The power of God has been poured out unto all nations through the Holy Spirit’s ministry beginning at Pentecost. *“To whom much [is] given, of him much will be required”* (Luke 12:48). Certainly saints were regenerated and indwelt by the Holy Spirit in the Old Testament. This is firmly established in the fact that before the Cross, Jesus taught the necessity of the new birth to Nicodemus (John 3). Yet the power of Pentecost so changed the landscape of the world that once it had time to germinate, it produced profound spiritual light throughout the entire globe as seen in the Reformation and the ensuing various awakenings that take place throughout the world until this very day.

Joel had spoken long ago of this eschatological event:
And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions. Even on the male and female servants in those days I will pour out my Spirit... And it shall come to pass that everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved (Joel 2:28-29, 32).

These events we know are recorded in Acts 2. The outpouring upon the Jews there was so transformational that it birthed the New Testament church. The kingdom of God, long prophesied in the Old Testament, would now be built. The believers became unstoppable. Peter, who had denied the Lord, was now preaching before thousands. The power that was often reserved in the Old Testament for the empowerment of kings and prophets was now placed upon every member of Christ's church. This small group of several thousand Jewish peasants spread throughout the Roman empire. As a result, we have witnessed both great and small from every tribe, tongue, nation, and people bow their knee to Jesus Christ.

This same Pentecostal power continues today. How can we who are endowed with such empowerment minimize sin and make excuses for it? We do not live in the bounds of the Old Testament but are sons and daughters of those apostolic patriarchs that came from Pentecost.

An Examination of the Sins of the Old Testament Saints

In spite of all the above evidence that New Testament saints are held to a higher standard, it is helpful to try to examine the lives and sins of specific Old Testament saints that are often used as an excuse for sin in our day and age of Gospel enlightenment.

What About David's Sins?

David was a man after God's own heart. Yet even David was an adulterer, a liar, and a murderer. Therefore God must allow Christians to commit gross sins and still bring them to heaven when they die. Or so the argument goes. Matthew Henry comments:

This sin of David's is recorded for warning to all, that he who thinks he stands may take heed lest he fall...But though God may suffer his people to fall into sin, and to lie a great while in it, yet he will, by some means or other, recover them to repentance, bring them to himself and to their right mind again.¹⁰³

David was recovered from his sin. Psalm 51 is one of the clearest and most beautiful expressions of repentance in the entire Scriptures. The point in considering David's folly and subsequent return to God is not to find excuses, but to instead fear. With all the darkness of the Old Testament, his ultimate goal was to please God due to the indwelling presence of the Spirit and the Word written upon his heart. When the Spirit of God convicted him through Nathan, he became broken hearted and wrote Psalm 51. How David hated his sin and grieved over it! If David can set that kind of an example in the darkness, how

¹⁰³Matthew Henry. *Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible : Complete and Unabridged in One Volume*. (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1996), Psalm 51:7.

much more holy ought we to live in the light of Christ's coming into the world?

Listen to an early sermon from John Chrysostom (347–407), considered "the greatest preacher in the early church".¹⁰⁴

For not to ease you into slothfulness, did I speak of the sins of David, but to work in you more fear. For if that righteous man through a little remissness received such wounds, what shall we have to suffer, who are every day negligent? Do not therefore look at his fall, and be remiss, but consider what great things he did even after this, what great mournings, how much repentance he showed forth, adding his nights to his days, pouring forth fountains of tears, washing his couch with his tears, withal clothing himself in sackcloth.

Now if he needed so great a conversion, when will it be possible for us to be saved, feeling insensible after so many sins?¹⁰⁵

What About Lot?

According to John R. Rice, founder of the publication *The Sword of the Lord* (and incidentally the founder of the church that I currently pastor), Lot was an example of a carnal Christian. Indeed he paints Lot as one who lived in willful, defiant sin.

Lot is an example of a worldly Christian. He put money and business ahead of serving the Lord. He moved toward Sodom, then into Sodom. He failed to save his wife, his children, his sons-in-law. He failed to win the men of Sodom. He called the

¹⁰⁴ Robert Wilkin, Everett Ferguson, ed., "John Chrysostom," *Encyclopedia of Early Christianity*. (New York: Garland, 1990), 495.

¹⁰⁵ Philip Schaff. "John Chrysostom: Homily XXVI from the Book of Matthew," *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers Vol. X* (Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems, 1997), 184.

wicked “brethren.” Lot sinned day by day. He had a new nature, and the new nature was always grieved at the sin about him. But Lot sinned by staying in Sodom and failing to win souls and by living a worldly life.¹⁰⁶

We have to ask ourselves where John R. Rice gets the idea that Lot sinned day by day. He further infers from his reference in Genesis 19:7 (“brothers”) that Lot was somehow a fellow idolater instead of simply being a member of the community. On the contrary, the apostle’s commentary on Lot is that he was “*greatly distressed by the sensual conduct of the wicked*” (2 Peter 2:7). Concerning Lot we find Augustine’s comments helpful:

“Lot also, the brother of Abraham, was just and hospitable in Sodom, and was found worthy to escape the conflagration which prefigured the future judgment; for he was free from all participation in the corruption of the people of Sodom. He was a type of the body of Christ, which in the person of all the saints both groans now among the ungodly and wicked, to whose evil deeds it does not consent, and will at the end of the world be rescued from their society, when they are doomed to the punishment of eternal fire.”¹⁰⁷

What were Lot’s sins? While in Sodom, we see that he offered his daughters to the wicked men of Sodom in order to protect his guests from being taken in sodomy. Strangely, Lot’s daughters appear to have already been married (Genesis 19:14).

¹⁰⁶ John R. Rice. *When a Christian Sins* (Murfreesboro, TN: Sword of the Lord, 2000), 19.

¹⁰⁷ Philip Schaff. “Aurelius Augustine: Reply to Faustus the Manichaeus, Book XXII,” *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers Vol. IV* (Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems, 1997), 288.

The angels that came to rescue him struck the crowd with blindness and rescued Lot, his family, and his guests, at least from the immediate incident. John Gill tries to put this offer of Lot's daughters in context, and in the end condemns the action:

...nothing can be said to excuse this good man, but the hurry of spirit, and confusion of mind that he was in, not knowing what to say or do to prevent the base designs of those men; that he might be pretty certain they would not accept of his offer, their lust burning more after men than women; that this showed his great regard to the laws of hospitality, that he had rather sacrifice his daughters to their brutal lusts, than give up the men that were in his house to them; and that he might hope that this would soften their minds, and put them off of any further attempt; but after all it must be condemned as a dangerous and imprudent action.¹⁰⁸

After the destruction of Sodom, when it looked to him as if he and his daughters were the only ones left on the earth, a disastrous event takes place in Lot's life. Concerning this event, Lot has been accused by some modern Bible commentators of the sin of incest, which as we will see is not correct. His daughters got him drunk, so he was an unknowing and unwilling participant. We do not condemn women who are slipped a drug and raped by accusing them of fornication. Neither should we condemn Lot. As Augustine says:

Knowing that their father would condemn their design, Lot's daughters thought it necessary to fulfill it without his knowledge. We are told that they made him drunk, so that he was unaware of what happened. His guilt therefore is not that of incest, but of drunkenness. This, too, is condemned by the

¹⁰⁸ John Gill. *Exposition of Genesis through Joshua* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1980), Genesis 19:8.

eternal law, which allows meat and drink only as required by nature for the preservation of health. There is, indeed, a great difference between a drunk man and an habitual drunkard; for the drunkard is not always drunk, and a man may be drunk on one occasion without being a drunkard. However, in the case of a righteous man, we require to account for even one instance of drunkenness.¹⁰⁹

Secondly, while being careful not to excuse what Lot's daughters did, we must recognize that they did not lie with their father to gratify lust but in order to preserve the human race. The Scripture implies that Lot's daughters thought they were the last ones on the planet. Augustine continues:

The resolution of Lot's daughters to lie with their father was the effect of the natural desire for offspring in order to preserve the race; for they supposed that there were no other men to be found, thinking that the whole world had been consumed in that conflagration, which, for all they knew, had left no one alive but themselves. It would have been better for them never to have been mothers, than to have become mothers by their own father. But still, the fulfillment of a desire like this is very different from the accursed gratification of lust.¹¹⁰

Thirdly, we do not know Lot's heart in the matter of this episode of drunkenness. Augustine's insights are helpful:

What can have made Lot consent to receive from his daughters all the cups of wine which they went on mixing for him, or perhaps giving him unmixed? Did they feign excessive grief, and did he resort to this consolation in their loneliness, and in the loss of their mother, thinking that they were drinking too,

¹⁰⁹Philip Schaff. "Augustine," *Nicene Fathers Vol. IV*, 288.

¹¹⁰Ibid.

while they only pretended to drink? But this does not seem a proper method for a righteous man to take in consoling his friends when in trouble. Had the daughters learned in Sodom some vile art which enabled them to intoxicate their father with a few cups, so that in his ignorance he might sin, or rather be sinned against?¹¹¹

Certainly Lot sinned, but let us not exaggerate his sins to excuse our sins. It is not as if justified persons cannot choose to sin, certainly they can and do, and sometimes grievously. But in context, the apostle Peter's testimony is true. Lot was a righteous man who when around sin had a vexed soul. Instead of excusing sin, let all true Christians ask themselves if we too are vexed with the sinful environment of this world.

Others

Solomon, Samson, Jonah, and others could be named. In all these cases, all returned to the Lord. It is probable that Solomon wrote Ecclesiastes after his life of backsliding. As a truly saved man, he returned to the Lord. The same could be said of Samson, Jonah and other Old Testament saints who fell into the deep valley of disobedience against the Lord.

What About the Polygamy?

Polygamy was a disastrous sin that was seen to be so even before the dawn of the New Testament age. "Monogamy was always the divine ideal for marriage in the Old Testament

¹¹¹Ibid.

(Genesis 2:20-24). Polygamy, though practiced by some, never appears in a positive light in the Old Testament; the Bible never describes a truly happy polygamous marriage.”¹¹² “Though polygamy and divorce were permitted in OT times, both were rare in practice. Only rich patriarchs and kings could afford the betrothal gift for more than one wife.”¹¹³

Many sins were regulated in the civil law of the Old Testament, such as slavery, divorce, and polygamy, but this in no way shows approval. These allowances were made “[b]ecause of [their] hardness of heart” (Matthew 19:8). William Shedd comments on these types of allowances:

...the existing condition and circumstances of the people made their immediate abolition impossible. Toleration is not approval, but the very contrary. It implies that the thing endured is intrinsically wrong. No one tolerates what is intrinsically right. Slavery and polygamy were not legalized and sanctioned by the Decalogue, though they were permitted temporarily under the theocracy.¹¹⁴

Indeed, after the return from the captivities, the practice of polygamy was practically unheard of among the Jews. In fact, when Christ gives his teaching on marriage, the major assault on marriage was coming from divorce.

Having said all that, it is true that some of the greatest men of the Old Testament practiced polygamy, including Abraham,

¹¹²John F. Walvoord. *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 301.

¹¹³Walter A. Elwell. *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1988), 475.

¹¹⁴William Greenough Thayer Shedd. *Dogmatic Theology*. 3rd ed. (Phillipsburg, NJ: Puritan and Reformed Publications, 2003), 291.

Isaac, Jacob, David, and Solomon. This again shows that New Testament Christians cannot excuse themselves because of the folly of Old Testament saints. What they did in the darkness of Old Testament anticipation, today's saints cannot do in the bright light of New Testament revelation.

What About the Scandalous Sins of Some New Testament Saints?

Now that Christ has come into the world, we possess the New Testament Scriptures, and we are empowered by the Holy Spirit, does this mean that New Testament Christians will not sin scandalously? Certainly a Christian may sin scandalously, but he will not continue in that sin, and the sin will always make him hate sin more and thereby be elevated to a greater state of zeal, power, holiness, and indignation for all sin. To be clear, the proposition of this book is not that a Christian will not sin, but that he will not *continue* in sin.

Peter

Peter is a good example of how a true Christian reacts to open or scandalous sin. Peter's denial of the Lord in Christ's hour of trial is probably the most notorious sin by a New Testament believer in the Scriptures. At the very moment of Peter's denial, just after the cock crows, the Lord Jesus, with swollen and beaten face, looks through the open window to the courtyard outside and makes eye contact with Peter. It is probably around 2 o'clock in the morning. We read in Luke 22:61-62,

And the Lord turned and looked at Peter. And Peter remembered the saying of the Lord, how he had said to him, "Before the

rooster crows today, you will deny me three times.” And he went out and wept bitterly.

We see the love of the Saviour in the believer’s sin. We see Peter’s brokenness. Yet if this is all we had, we could not be sure Peter was a believer. Judas Iscariot also wept bitterly but went on to commit suicide. What follows in Peter’s life confirms he is in the faith. His weeping comes from a heart of true repentance. How do we know this? He is restored by the Lord before His ascension (John 21:15-20). His reinstatement after this point exhibits a higher level of holiness and confidence than he had before. At Pentecost (Acts 2) Peter’s boldness and spiritual endowment are remarkable. Peter demonstrates that after a believer sins, even scandalously, and is restored, his hatred for sin and zeal for God are greatly strengthened.

The Immoral Man from Corinth

The immoral man from Corinth is another example of a professing Christian sinning scandalously, repenting, and being restored. He was guilty of fornication with his stepmother (1 Corinthians 5:1). Now before we give comfort to anyone who would like to call himself a Christian while living in open sin, let us understand that at this point, if we had no other information, we could not say this man was a believer. Those whose life is characterized by the practice of sin “*will not inherit the kingdom of God*” (1 Corinthians 6:9, Revelation 21:8; Galatians 5:19-20).

Having said that, we do have record of this man’s repentance in 2 Corinthians 2:6-7. Paul writes that this man with his entire church demonstrated true godly repentance:

For such a one, this punishment by the majority is enough, so you should rather turn to forgive and comfort him, or he may be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow .

Paul says this man demonstrated such a display of genuine repentance that the church ought to forgive him. This is the response of truly born again people. When confronted with the reality of his sin, a Christian will eventually turn back to God. God's Spirit will "*cause*" him to walk in His statutes (Ezekiel 36:27). Without a perseverance in holiness and a continual repentance from sin, there can be no confidence that anyone has genuinely experienced the new birth. We see this in this repentant man from Corinth. Additionally we have the encouraging record that the church also repented for allowing such a person to live this way in their midst (2 Corinthians 7:2).

The New Testament Hall of Shame

The New Testament also records the sad accounts of those who put their hand to the plow and looked back. Apostasy is a very real happening in the church. Sadly, many of the people listed below would probably be kept on the church rolls in many churches. They would be deemed as "carnal Christians".

Judas Iscariot

Judas Iscariot fooled everyone (except the Lord) into thinking he was a believer. He was one of the twelve; indeed, so great was his trust that he functioned as the treasurer of the group and kept track of the funds. Yet Christ sees his heart and refers to him as "*the son of destruction*" in his high priestly prayer (John 17:12). When Judas had the chance, he betrayed the Lord with a kiss (Luke 22:47-48). He had told the Jewish leaders in

Matthew 26:48, “The one I will kiss is the man; seize him.” The word Matthew uses for “kiss” means to kiss “repeatedly, loudly, effusively”.¹¹⁵ Judas could have simply pointed to the Lord, but under Satan’s control he betrayed the Lord with the ugliest hypocrisy.

Judas seemed to repent with tears, but it was not a God-centered repentance, for in the act of repentance he rebelled against God by committing self-murder. He was sorry for the circumstances, not that he had offended and betrayed a holy God.

Then when Judas, his betrayer, saw that Jesus was condemned, he changed his mind and brought back the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and the elders, saying, “I have sinned by betraying innocent blood.” They said, “What is that to us? See to it yourself.” And throwing down the pieces of silver into the temple, he departed, and he went and hanged himself (Matthew 27:3-5).

We should let Judas be a warning to us, that though a person is well-received in the church, this does not establish his salvation. A person may repent with tears and it not be godly repentance. Judas was a false convert.

Ananias and Sapphira

¹¹⁵ Alfred Edersheim. *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah, Volume 2* (Bellingham, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 2003), 543.

Ananias and Sapphira are another case of false converts. Their sin of lying to the Holy Spirit was judged immediately with capital punishment. Matthew Henry comments:

The disciples were very holy, and heavenly, and seemed to be all exceedingly good; *but* there were hypocrites among them, whose *hearts were not right in the sight of God*, who, when they were baptized, and took upon them *the form of godliness, denied the power of godliness*, and stopped short of that. There is a mixture of bad with good in the best societies on this side heaven; tares will grow among the wheat until the harvest.¹¹⁶

Their sin was not that they had not sold everything, but that they acted as if they had when bringing the money before Peter. To Ananias Peter asks, “*why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit...?*” (Acts 5:3). Ananias and Sapphira were not under the control of the Spirit of God, but were still “*sons of disobedience*” and under the control of “*the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience*” (Ephesians 2:2). Therefore God acts toward them not in loving compassion and patience as children with Christ being the Advocate for their sins, but instead there is the swift judgment of an infuriated judge.

Here we have another picture of apostasy. Those who pretend to be Christians but use the Almighty God for their advantage will be judged. “*For it is time for judgment to begin at the household of God*” (1 Peter 4:17).

Demas

¹¹⁶Matthew Henry. *Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible : Complete and Unabridged in One Volume*. (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1996), Acts 5:1.

We could have named many others such as Alexander the coppersmith, Hymenaeus, and Philetus, but by way of example, we will deal with the infamous Demas. As Paul is nearing execution probably in the Mamertine prison of Rome, he writes his final words to Timothy. Near the end of his letter the heart-breaking words are enscribed: “*For Demas, in love with this present world, has deserted me*” (2 Timothy 4:10). This man was one of Paul’s close associates when he wrote Colossians 4:14.¹¹⁷ The pull of the world was too enticing for Demas, the fear of persecution too great, and he deserted not only Paul, but it seems the faith also. The idea Paul presents is that “Demas has begun to love and still loves the present age.”¹¹⁸ This is a picture of apostasy. It was Christ who said, “*My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me*” (John 10:27). Those who do not follow are not Christ’s sheep.

All Saints Persevere to the End

What of true children of God? Can they fall away and still be saved? My answer in this chapter has been no. The writer of Hebrews tells us that truly justified people live by faith until the very end: “*but my righteous one shall live by faith, and if he shrinks back, my soul has no pleasure in him*” (Hebrews 10:38). Though I am only looking at this from one angle, my hope is that I will change the minds of those who would use the sins of saints as excuses, exaggerating their falls or not understanding the context of their situations. John Gill summarizes

¹¹⁷D.A. Carson. *New Bible Commentary: 21st Century Edition*, 4th ed. (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1994), 2 Timothy 4:9.

¹¹⁸George W. Knight. *The Pastoral Epistles: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 1992), 464.

one of the points of this chapter well, that though saints can and do fall, they do not fall away completely.

...Objections are raised against the doctrine of the saints' final perseverance, from the sins and falls of persons eminent for faith and holiness; as Noah, Lot, David, Solomon, Peter, and others. But these are no proofs of their final and total falling away. As to Noah and Lot, though guilty of great sins, they have after this, the character of truly good and righteous men. As for David, the spirit of God was not take from him (Psalm 51: 11-12). As for Solomon, though his backsliding was great, yet not total (see 1 Kings 11:4-6). Some persons, after his death, are spoken of with commendation, for walking in the way of Somomon, as well as in the way of David (2 Chronicles 11:17). As for Peter, his fall was not total; Christ prayed for him, that his faith failed not; nor final; for he was quickly restored by repentance: these several instances are recorded in scripture, for our caution and instruction, to take heed lest we fall.¹¹⁹

No Comparison Between Old and New

Having heard the words of Gill concerning the overall doctrine of perseverance, my hope is that the new covenant believer in Christ will feel an even greater weight of responsibility for living a holy life. Why? Because there really is no comparison between the depth of revelation we have today and what they had in the Old Testament. Jesus said to those who had witnessed and rejected his glorious ministry that there would be a more fierce judgment awaiting them.

Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the mighty works done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. But

¹¹⁹ John Gill. *Complete Body of Practical and Doctrinal Divinity* (Philadelphia: Delaplaine and Hellings, 1810), 400-401.

I tell you, it will be more bearable on the day of judgment for Tyre and Sidon than for you. And you, Capernaum, will you be exalted to heaven? You will be brought down to Hades. For if the mighty works done in you had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day. But I tell you that it will be more tolerable on the day of judgment for the land of Sodom than for you (Matthew 11:21-24).

As I said at the beginning of this chapter, “*to whom much [is] given, of him much will be required*” (Luke 12:48). Woe unto us who have learned of Christ to use the sins of other saints as an excuse to sin or to give assurance to any one who continues in sin. It will be more tolerable for Sodom in that day than for us. May we persevere to the end “*looking unto Jesus*”, not to any not yet perfected saint.

19

Is There a Sin Unto Death?



“...happy are those who are born of God, for they do not sin this sin; and through the use of the armour of God, and the power of divine grace, they keep themselves from the evil one, and he cannot come at them, to draw them into this sin...”

JOHN GILL



*M*any have used the idea of a “*sin unto death*” as a pillar to demonstrate that all Christians will not necessarily be sanctified in this life. Their sin may be so grievous to God that He would take them in death. While it is true that the Lord may take Christians prematurely in death because He loves them, this is not the “*sin unto death*” that John speaks of in 1 John 5:16-17. The most common passage on Christians dying through God’s chastening is found in 1 Corinthians 11.

Some are Sick, and a Number Have Died

It is true that sickness and even death may come to a Christian because of sin in order to keep him from a life of sin in this world and damnation in the world to come.

For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment on himself. That is why many of you are weak and ill, and some have died. But if we judged ourselves truly, we would not be judged. But when we are judged by the Lord, we are disciplined so that we may not be condemned along with the world (1 Corinthians 11:29-32).

Matthew Henry wrote concerning this passage:

The Corinthians came to the Lord’s table as to a common feast, *not discerning the Lord’s body*—not making a difference or distinction between that and common food, but setting both on a level: nay, they used much more indecency at this sacred feast than they would have done at a civil one. This was very sinful in them, and very displeasing to God, and brought down his judgments on them: *For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep*. Some were punished with sickness, and some with death. Note, A careless and irreverent receiving of the Lord’s supper may bring temporal

punishments. Yet the connection seems to imply that even those who were thus punished were in a state of favour with God, at least many of them: *They were chastened of the Lord, that they should not be condemned with the world*, v. 32. Now divine chastening is a sign of divine love: *Whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth* (Heb. 12:6), especially with so merciful a purpose, to prevent their final condemnation. In the midst of judgment, God remembers mercy: he frequently punishes those whom he tenderly loves. It is kindness to use the rod to prevent the child's ruin. He will visit such iniquity as this under consideration with stripes, and yet make those stripes the evidence of his lovingkindness. Those were in the favour of God who yet so highly offended him in this instance, and brought down judgments on themselves; at least many of them were; for they were punished by him out of fatherly good-will, punished now that they might not perish for ever. Note, It is better to bear trouble in this world than to be miserable to eternity. And God punishes his people now, to prevent their eternal woe.¹²⁰

God will not allow a Christian to continue in sin. Whom the Lord loves He chastens. He will bring sickness so that the believer would examine himself. He will hold the believer back from further sinning through sickness so that he would “*not be condemned along with the world*” (1 Corinthians 11:32). God may even bring death to a Christian prematurely to bring about His righteous purposes and Christlike conformity. But one thing is certain, he will not allow the Christian to leave this world willfully persisting in known sin. God's sanctifying purposes of Romans 8:29, Ezekiel 36:27, and Ephesians 2:10

¹²⁰Matthew Henry. *Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible : Complete and Unabridged in One Volume*. (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1996), 1 Corinthians 11:23.

are never cast aside. God's purpose in taking the Christian's life is so that the church as a whole will fear and take note. Having said all of that, 1 Corinthians 11 does not address the "*sin unto death*". The sin unto death, as we will see, is a sin unto *eternal damnation*.

What is the Sin Unto Death?

If anyone sees his brother committing a sin not leading to death, he shall ask, and God will give him life—to those who commit sins that do not lead to death. There is sin that leads to death; I do not say that one should pray for that. All wrongdoing is sin, but there is sin that does not lead to death (1 John 5:16-17).

There is a sin unto death (i.e. eternal damnation), and John clearly states that we are not required to pray for those who have committed such a sin. This "*sin unto death*" is a willful rejection of grace as seen in the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit, or of those who have tasted of the blessings of Christ yet in unbelief and have rejected Christ even after having touched and tasted Christianity superficially. There are those who put their hand to the plow and turn back. There are those who are superficially connected to the vine. If they depart from the faith and fall away after having been introduced to the possibility of grace they can never be renewed unto repentance for they "*are crucifying once again the Son of God to their own harm and holding him up to contempt*" (Hebrews 6:6). Again the writer of Hebrews says:

Anyone who has set aside the law of Moses dies without mercy on the evidence of two or three witnesses. How much worse punishment, do you think, will be deserved by the one who has

spurned the Son of God, and has profaned the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has outraged the Spirit of grace? (Hebrews 10:28-29).

He who can despise and reject God's grace after having been brushed with it over and over again sins the sin unto death. The result of the sin unto death is self-evident: eternal damnation. It is not simply unto death, for we all die, and there is a sin that is "*not unto death*". Christians will sin. We miss the mark of God's perfection daily. For that we have an Advocate, Jesus Christ the Righteous. But there is a sin that Christ's blood will not cover. It is a serial rejection of His grace. There is a line that is crossed in this sin in which the Spirit of God will no longer strive with that man. This sin cannot be committed by a genuine Christian. John Bunyan described it as: "the sin from which he that is born of God is kept".¹²¹ Many people have asked me if they have committed this unpardonable sin. I always tell them that if they are concerned about it and seeking Christ's mercy, then they certainly have not committed it, since those who have committed this sin have fallen away from the faith and are no longer seeking grace. John Gill speaks to Christians about this sin:

...happy are those who are born of God, for they do not sin this sin; and through the use of the armour of God, and the power of divine grace, they keep themselves from the evil one, and he cannot come at them, to draw them into this sin; also they know that they are of God, and are distinguished from the world, which lies in wickedness; yea, they know that the Son of God is come in the flesh, and hath given them an

¹²¹ John Bunyan. *The Works of John Bunyan, Volume 1* (Mulberry, IN: Sovereign Grace Publishers, 2001), 596.

understanding of the true God, by which they know that they are in him, and in his Son Jesus Christ, who is with him, and the divine Spirit, the one true God, and the author and giver of eternal life...¹²²

The practical outworking of John's teaching is that we must not trifle with the grace of God. This is of very urgent importance among the children of professing Christians. I have seen these verses more fulfilled in second and third generations of those who profess Christ. May we who profess Christ actually be possessed by Him and never give a reason to our children or any one else's children to despise the blood of Christ.

The Lord Shall Judge His People

After speaking of those who fall away in Hebrews 10, the writer of Hebrews gives a stern warning to anyone who would profess to know Christ:

*For we know him who said, "Vengeance is mine; I will repay."
And again, "The Lord will judge his people." It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God (verses 30-31).*

Truly the Lord shall judge His people. The sense of the Scripture is that God will divide the sheep from the goats. He will one day bring vengeance and recompense for those who dwelt among His people, said they were His people, and yet were in no way born of Him. Matthew Henry describes this great separation that God will undertake:

...he will search and try his visible church, and will discover and detect those who say they are Jews, and are not, but are of the synagogue of Satan; and he will separate the precious from the

¹²²John Gill: *Exposition of the Entire Bible*. (Joseph Kreifels, n.d.), 1 John 5:1.

vile, and will punish the sinners in Zion with the greatest severity.¹²³

Christ spoke specifically of this separation at the end of time between true and false believers:

When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. And he will place the sheep on his right, but the goats on the left. Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world... Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels... And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life (Matthew 25:31-34, 41, 46).

The verses not listed above speak of Christ investigating the fruit of their life. The true believers had a life of righteousness, compassion, and good works. They were not saved by these works, but their salvation was made evident by them. In the same way, the goats (unbelievers) are cast away because they lacked righteousness, compassion, and good works. Their lack of fruit showed that they did not have a changed heart.

Whom the Lord Loves He Chastens

“For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives” (Hebrews 12:6). The Lord is

¹²³Matthew Henry. *Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible : Complete and Unabridged in One Volume*. (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1996), Hebrews 10:19

longsuffering, merciful, and full of compassion. He chastens His children because He loves them. When we for a moment get our eyes off of our heavenly Father and start living for this present evil world, our Father will chasten us! God never spares the rod for His children, though he never gives anything near what we deserve. A Christian may fall into sin, even grievously. But a Christian will always be brought out of that sin through God's chastening hand.

You may ask, what about the Christian who dies while practicing sin? The Bible is clear that this scenario is not possible. I have already shown that no true believer will die in a state in which they can be characterized as practicing sin.¹²⁴ If the true believer has had a sickness as a result of God's chastening for sin and has shown fruit of repentance and still dies, then we should give glory to God and fear our loving Father's chastening hand. Many times though, God will heal the sickness if has been brought on because of chastening. As James says:

Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer of faith will save the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven (James 5:14-15).

We cannot know the heart of man nor the mind of God, so we cannot be sure of anyone until we get to glory. Yet we can be sure that anyone who practices a life of lawlessness is not a true believer. Can a person repent and be born again if they turn to Christ just before they die? Certainly. Consider the thief on the cross. I have personally known of several who I believe showed

¹²⁴ See chapter 14, "The Unrighteous Will Not Inherit the Kingdom".

evidence of godly repentance just days or hours before death. Let us never forget that God is an infinitely merciful and gracious God!



A.W. Tozer, “I Call it Heresy!”



“The Lord will not save those whom He cannot command. He will not divide His offices. You cannot believe on a half-Christ. We take Him for what He is--the anointed Saviour and Lord who is King of kings and Lord of all lords!”

A. W. TOZER



A. W. Tozer in his book *I Call it Heresy* loudly warned of the damage the carnal Christian teaching does to the offices of Christ. He said:

The Lord will not save those whom He cannot command. He will not divide His offices. You cannot believe on a half-Christ. We take Him for what He is--the anointed Saviour and Lord who is King of kings and Lord of all lords! He would not be Who He is if He saved us and called us and chose us without the understanding that He can also guide and control our lives.¹²⁵

Can Christ's Offices Be Divided?

He opened the book with a statement that would split most churches.

The Scriptures do not teach that the Person of Jesus Christ nor any of the important offices which God has given Him can be divided or ignored according to the whims of men.

Therefore, I must be frank in my feeling that a notable heresy has come into being throughout our evangelical Christian circles--the widely accepted concept that we humans can choose to accept Christ only because we need Him as Savior and we have the right to postpone our obedience to Him as Lord as long as we want to!¹²⁶

It is widely taught in many churches today that a person can receive Jesus Christ as Savior and then sometime down the road come to a point of "surrender" and yield control to His Lordship. Tozer testifies of his own experience: "I think the fol-

¹²⁵ A. W. Tozer, *I Call It Heresy!* (Harrisburg, Pa.: Christian Publications, 1974), 18-19.

¹²⁶*Ibid.*, 1.

lowing is a fair statement of what I was taught in my early Christian experience: ‘We are saved by accepting Christ as our Savior; we are sanctified by accepting Christ as our Lord; we may do the first without doing the second!’” Tozer struggled with this concept earlier in his ministry.

I confess that I was among those who preached it before I began to pray earnestly, to study diligently and meditate with anguish over the whole matter.¹²⁷

The Popularity of this Teaching in the Churches

Tozer explains the stronghold this teaching has on the churches and how it is presented:

[W]e often hear the Gospel appeal made on this kind of basis: “Come to Jesus! You do not have to obey anyone. You do not have to change anything. You do not have to give up anything, alter anything, surrender anything, give back anything—just come to Him and believe in Him as Savior!”

So they come and believe in the Savior. Later on, in a meeting or conference, they will hear another appeal:

“Now that you have received Him as Savior, how would you like to take Him as Lord?”¹²⁸

The Keswicks and the “Deeper” Life

Tozer refers to the history of this teaching. The Keswicks taught a “deeper” Christian life. Mr. Tozer was unimpressed with what it had become in his day:

Today, we let them say they are saved no matter how imperfect and incomplete the transaction, with the proviso that the

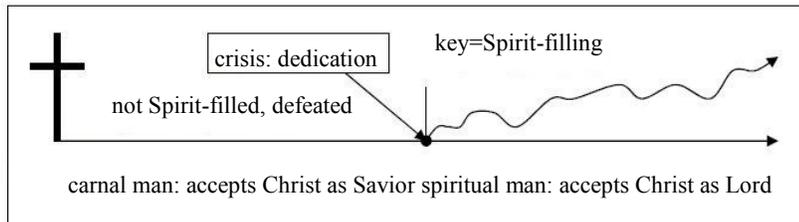
¹²⁷Ibid., 2.

¹²⁸Ibid.

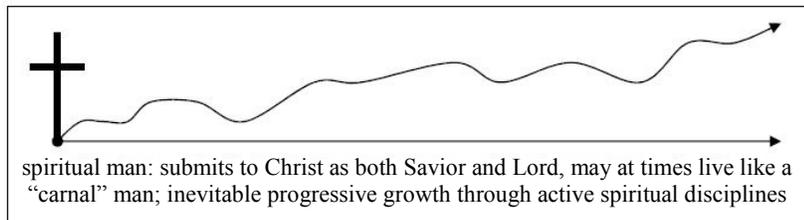
deeper Christian life can be tacked on at some time in the future.¹²⁹

To be accurate, the deeper life movement has had many excellent characteristics about it and some outstanding Christians who have a great reward in heaven (D.L. Moody, Hudson Taylor, Amy Carmichael, Andrew Murray, and many others). But their view of sanctification has led to confusion for many. To visualize the differences between the historic understanding of sanctification and the deeper life view, consider these two charts:¹³⁰

Deeper Life “Chaferian” Sanctification



Historic (Reformed) Sanctification



¹²⁹Ibid., 13.

¹³⁰ Charts by Andrew D. Naselli, Ph.D. “Keswick Theology: A Survey and Analysis of the Doctrine of Sanctification in the Early Keswick Movement” (William R. Rice Lecture Series at Detroit Baptist Theological Seminary), March 19, 2008.

The danger, as Tozer warned, is a dividing of Christ's offices. The result is that a person who has no fruit of the new birth could be classified as a genuinely born again person. We must remember that this mistake has eternal consequences for the deceived person. Sadly, what the deeper life movement has become is a marketing tool to say that you can accept Christ as Saviour today, and sometime later you can receive Him as Lord. It is especially handy in very large churches since the only outward sign needed for regeneration (and therefore church membership) is that the person "prayed the prayer". Ligon Duncan was right when he recently said, "You cannot use a method that is fundamentally self-centered to invite people into a moral universe that is fundamentally God-centered."¹³¹ It is self-centered and truly immoral to build a local church on this kind of marketing when people's souls hang in the balance.

Tozer's Criticism of the "Second Blessing"

Tozer himself was living in the environment of the deeper life movement. We can guess that he was not well-liked among them. His critiques were often biting:

I may be misunderstood when I say this, but we even have two works of grace because the first was so apologetically meaningless that we try to have two. ...I am pleading for the work that ought to be done in a man's heart when he first meets God. What I am asking is this: Why should we be forced to invent some second or third or fourth experience somewhere along the line to obtain what we should have received the first

¹³¹ Ligon Duncan. Philadelphia Conference on Reformed Theology. "The Sufficient Word", March 3, 2007.

time we met God? ...we ought not to downgrade the new birth in order to find a place for the anointing of the Holy Spirit.¹³²

Many Churches No Longer Teach the New Birth

His conclusion is that churches have lost the biblical teaching of the new birth. They have signed people up for church membership, giving them hope of salvation without any evidence that the new birth has actually taken place:

Some evangelicals are slow to admit it, but I know that this important matter of the new birth has fallen into cold hands, along with many other important Bible teachings.¹³³

If we believe the New Testament we must surely believe that the new birth is a major miracle, as truly a miracle of God as was the first creation, for the new birth is actually the creating of another man in the heart where another man had been.

I believe this is the kind of genuine Christian conversion that we are talking about—the putting of a new man in the old man’s place, so that we are born “anew” ...¹³⁴

...we have watered down the miracle of divine grace to a point where you actually must find a name on the record books to know whether an individual is a Christian or not.

Brethren, there is a difference! There is also a sad and terrible day of judgment yet to come, a day of revelation and shock for those who have depended upon a mental assent to Christianity instead of the miracle of the new birth!¹³⁵

¹³²Tozer, *I Call It Heresy*, 31.

¹³³Ibid., 36.

¹³⁴Ibid., 37.

¹³⁵Ibid., 34.

Tozer's greatest burden was that people were being told they were Christians because they gave mental ascent to the facts of Christ's death, praying a prayer, or signing a church membership card without actually partaking of the divine nature in the new birth.

The Danger of a Cold, Academic Understanding

Tozer goes on to explain how false professors approach the eternal God with a cold academic view that is devoid of yearning for the eternal presence of God. Because the false professor of Christianity cannot see heaven, he makes himself comfortable on earth while speaking about eternal realities with a cold and merely academic understanding.

It is a great temptation to take the shallow view that we do not need any heaven promised for tomorrow because we are so well situated here and now.

This is the emphasis of our day: "We don't need hope—we have it now!"

But the modern emphasis is wretched and it is wrong. When we do talk about the future we talk about eschatology instead of heaven. When I find any Christian who can live and work and serve here and snuggle down into the world like your hand fits into an old and familiar glove, I worry about him. I must wonder if he has ever truly been born again.

Brethren, we are still living in a wicked and adulterous generation and I must confess that the Christians I meet who really amount to something for the Savior are very much out of key and out of tune with their generation.¹³⁶

¹³⁶Ibid., 39.

A True Christian Burns with Holiness

Tozer describes the life of a true Christian—he lives in holiness. He lives in humility. Marriage is honored. There is tangible fruit. The difference between a true believer and the world is radical.

...if you want to be a Christian, you must agree to a very much different life. The life of obedience to Jesus Christ means living moment by moment in the Spirit of God and it will be so different from your former life that you will often be considered strange. In fact, the life in the Spirit is such a different life that some of your former associates will probably discuss the question of whether or not you are mentally disturbed. The true Christian may seem a strange person indeed to those who make their observations only from the point of view of this present world, which is alienated from God and His gracious plan of salvation.

Consider now these glorious contradictions and you will no longer wonder why the true believer in Jesus Christ is such an amazement to this world.¹³⁷

Living in Light of the Second Coming

In chapter 12 of his book, Tozer argues from the standpoint of the Second Coming. He says that the Christ's coming ought not lead us to speculation, but to holiness. You can always tell a true believer from a fake, because the true believer purifies himself as he lives in light of Christ's coming. Tozer explains:

I fear that we have gone to seed on this whole matter of His return. Why is it that such a small proportion of Christian ministers ever feel the necessity to preach a sermon on the truth of His second coming? Why should pastors depend in this

¹³⁷Ibid., 160.

matter upon those who travel around the country with their colored charts and their object lessons and their curious interpretations of Bible prophecy?

Should we not dare to believe what the Apostle John wrote, that “we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is” (1 John 3:2)?

...Then, John says bluntly and clearly: “And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure” (3:3). Everybody! Every man, he says! He singularizes it. Every man that has this hope in him purifies himself as He is pure!

...The bride wants to be dressed worthy of the bridegroom, and so it is with the groom, as well! Should not the church of Jesus Christ be dressed worthy of her bridegroom, even as He is dressed? Pure—even as He is pure?

We are assured that the appearing of Jesus Christ will take place. It will take place in His time. There are many who believe that it can take place soon—that there is not anything which must yet be done in this earth to make possible His coming.

It will be the greatest event in the history of the world, barring His first coming and the events of His death and resurrection.

We may well say that the next greatest event in the history of the world will be the appearing of Jesus Christ: “though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory” (1 Peter 1:8).

The world will not know it, but he that has this hope in him will know it for he has purified himself even as Christ is pure!¹³⁸

Can we call the dividing of Christ’s offices a heresy? I believe Tozer is right. It is a teaching that harms the church. Are there many good men that love Christ that hold the Keswick

¹³⁸Ibid., 183-184.

view of sanctification? Certainly. My hope in examining Tozer's book is to shed light on the dangers of getting this wrong. No Christian wants to give false hope to a false convert. My prayer is that many pastors and lay people will consider the Scripture's teaching of the Person of Christ, how He is both Saviour and Lord, and how His offices cannot be divided. If we permit the confusion concerning this teaching to continue, ungodly professors of Christ will continue in their sin while insisting that they are already converted. We must prevent further damage to the testimony of the Lord's churches by immediately correcting the confusion and preaching the truth clearly and boldly.



John's Battle Against the Antinomian Gnostics



“I believe many within the professing church have swallowed the deception of the ancient Gnostics that the new birth does not necessarily have to result in a change of life.”



The carnal Christian controversy is not a new one. It is truly as old as the devil himself. As long as God has been redeeming fallen man, Satan has been whispering in the ears of unregenerate people giving them false assurance. John battled against a group of people within the churches of his day that were claiming that Christians could practice an ongoing life of sin. John was inspired by the Holy Spirit to put a stop to it. The resulting book is part of the inspired Word of God—it is the book of 1 John.

Two Audiences

The whole book of First John is written to true Christians in their battle against the Gnostic false professors who were trying to infiltrate their churches. John's goal is to show how a person can *know* they are a Christian and recognize the fruit that genuine regeneration always produces. The essential argument of 1 John is that there are certain evidences and marks whereby you will definitely know if you have experienced the new birth.

Purpose: Give Believers a Full Assurance of Salvation

The purpose statement of the entire book is found in 1 John 5:13, "*I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God that you may know that you have eternal life.*" John's motivation for writing was to give Christians a full assurance of the faith they profess to. John Piper summarizes the purpose of 1 John by compiling all the reasons John has said he has written this letter. Piper's synopsis is helpful:

Summing up all these reasons for writing 1 John goes like this:
I am writing because you are true believers, but there are

deceivers in your midst, and I want you to be rock-solid confident in your present possession of eternal life as regenerate children of God, so that you are not drawn away after sin. And if this letter has that effect my joy will be complete. So at the heart of his reason for writing is the desire to help them know they are born again—that they now have new spiritual life. Eternal life.¹³⁹

The phrases “*we know*” or “*hereby we know*” or “*that we may know*” are found over and over again in John’s writings—17 times in the Gospel of John and 14 times in the book of 1 John. If you count the parallel words and ideas such as to “*know*”, “*believe*”, “*love God*” “*abide in God*”, or “*see God*”, then John’s theme becomes crystal clear: he wants believers to have the assurance of their security in Christ.

The whole message of 1 John asks this question: what does a person with the new birth look like? John’s teaching leads us to conclude that a transformed heart will *always* result in a transformed life. John is so unequivocal at this point, that perhaps we should have began the first chapter with a study of this book, and we could have ended all controversy. John unequivocally teaches that a born again person cannot continue in sin.

Similarities Between the Modern Carnal Christian Teaching and Ancient Gnosticism

The results of the carnal Christian teaching are similar to Gnosticism as they both do great damage to the doctrine of regeneration. The reason for writing 1 John was because there were false teachers, the Gnostics who denied the necessary

¹³⁹ John Piper. *Finally Alive* (Scotland: Christian Focus Publications, 2009), 125.

evidence of the new birth. Of course they said they were born again, but they had no fruit. Martin Luther saw this ancient phenomenon in his day. In the year 1521, just six months after his appearance at the Diet of Worms, he fought against antinomian teachings in the following portion of an early sermon.

For it is impossible for him who believes in Christ, as a just Savior, not to love and to do good. If, however, he does not do good nor love, it is sure that faith is not present. Therefore man knows by the fruits what kind of a tree it is, and it is proved by love and deed whether Christ is in him and he believes in Christ.¹⁴⁰

What great spiritual insight Luther had. No one who is truly in Christ can continue with a life that is characterized by sin. It is not a popular thing to say, but it is Gospel truth. Building a congregation on any other truth is like building a house on the sand.

The Gnostics' Doctrine was Seductive and Tempting

Pastors and church leaders today are tempted to entertain the goats instead of feeding the sheep. Many have shifted from thoughtful line upon line teaching in the churches to a "show business" sensationalistic mentality. I believe many within the professing church have swallowed the deception of the ancient Gnostics that the new birth does not necessarily have to result in a change of life. John sounded a clarion call to holiness in the

¹⁴⁰ Martin Luther. *The Precious and Sacred Writings of Martin Luther, Volume 11*, "Concerning Faith and Good Works" (Minneapolis, MN: Lutherans in All Lands Press, 1906), 40.

book of 1 John. He wrote and warned the Christians of his day in 1 John 2:26-27 that they should not fall under such a deception:

I write these things to you about those who are trying to deceive you. But the anointing that you received from him abides in you, and you have no need that anyone should teach you. But as his anointing teaches you about everything, and is true, and is no lie—just as it has taught you, abide in him.

The word seduce means to “to cause to stray...to lead away from the truth, to lead into error, to deceive.”¹⁴¹ The Gnostics seduced people into believing that behavior is not important. This is a great temptation today for church leaders. It is much easier to excuse sin than to deal with it in the church. Those who have hoisted the carnal Christian teaching onto their churches give great comfort to those who have no evidence of the new birth. It is a great temptation because it can bring in greater numbers. Less people are offended since there is no need to change. A person can live just as an unsaved person and still go to heaven. Lewis Sperry Chafer, who laid the modern foundation of antinomianism in the church was clear that a so-called ‘carnal’ Christian and an unbeliever are indistinguishable. He said:

The ‘carnal’ Christian is... characterized by a ‘walk’ that is on the same plane as that of the ‘natural’ [unsaved] man.¹⁴²

The Gnostics taught the same in John’s time. They said that you could be reconciled with God and still practice sin as a way

¹⁴¹James H. Strong. *The Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible*, electronic edition (Ontario: Woodside Bible Fellowship, 1996), G4105.

¹⁴² Lewis Sperry Chafer, *He that is Spiritual*, rev. ed. (Zondervan: Grand Rapids, 1987), 21.

of life. They minimized the seriousness of sin. John is therefore constantly drawing a line in the congregations between the saved and the lost. Listen to Pastor John preach in 1 John 3:10, *“By this it is evident who are the children of God, and who are the children of the devil: whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is the one who does not love his brother.”* This tells us that humanity can be divided into two groups—the children of God and the children of the devil. No other classification is possible. Yet how tempting and seductive it is to draw the “carnal Christian” distinction for the sake of padding the pews with warm bodies!

The Gnostics Delighted in a Man-Centered Way of Living

Fourteen times the Apostle John compels his readers to love the brethren.¹⁴³ The Gnostics were not concerned about exalting Christ and lifting up others. They were interested in a selfish way of living. They would have loved Frank Sinatra's song, “I did it my way”. One of the first signs of the new birth, John says, is a deep affection for other Christians and a desire to be around them and lift them up. John was teaching nothing new. John was following the Lord who said in John 13:35, *“By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another”* *By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.* The Gnostics cared less about love and desired instead a special “*knowledge*” to puff them up (1 Corinthians 8:1). It is obvious by John's letter that the Gnostics were intensely self-focused and self-serving.

¹⁴³ 1 John 3:11; 3:14; 3:16; 3:17; 3:18; 3:23; 4:7; 4:8; 4:11; 4:12; 4:20; 4:21; 5:2; 5:3.

The Gospel on the other hand makes a person God-serving and others-focused.

The Gnostics Departed from the True Faith

The most controversial thing John said to the believers was that the Gnostics had departed from the faith. He taught that genuine holiness was necessary, and the churches began to shrink because the Gnostics did not want to hear that. John is quite clear:

They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us. But they went out, that it might become plain that they all are not of us (1 John 2:19).

Listen to A.W. Tozer's comments on John:

Yes, John could have taken the easier way. Just a little compromise and the important people would begin to say, "This man is really doing good things for the community." But John was a man of faith. He knew *what* he believed; he knew *in whom* he believed. He was willing to take the heat...¹⁴⁴

The price for standing up for a Gospel that radically changes people is smaller churches. I did not say "small" churches, but smaller ones. There are some very large faithful churches in our day. There is nothing spiritually noble about being small or large. We are called to be faithful. It was hard to stay faithful in John's day, and it is the same in ours. Most pastors want to sweep departing people under the rug. Very few churches today indeed practice church discipline. John on the

¹⁴⁴A. W. Tozer. *The Tozer Topical Reader, Volume 2* (Camp Hill, PA: WingSpread, 1998), 83

other hand drew attention to the people departing the churches. In essence he was saying if the people were truly regenerate, they would have remained in the church.

How many churches are there today that have no real examination and inquiry into the soul of new members? How fearful pastors are for people to depart. This is because many churches are built on the principle of what Charles Spurgeon called “entertaining the goats instead of feeding the sheep”?¹⁴⁵ Many churches have even departed from the true faith because of a focus on numbers instead of holiness. I read an article recently from *Portfolio* magazine, a premiere business magazine. One of the cover stories is on Joel Osteen. It is called, “God Wants Me to Be Rich”.¹⁴⁶ This is the Gospel according to Joel Osteen. He believes part of the reason Christ died was so that you could be healthy and wealthy. How do we know if Joel is right or if he has departed from the faith? Titus 1:9 tells us that if we “*hold firm to the trustworthy word*” then we are going to stop the mouths of those such as Osteen and others who have departed from the faith.

In John's fight against the antinomian Gnostics, he gave eleven marks of a true believer. No where does he mention earthly wealth, prosperity, or “living your best life now”. The book of 1 John is a masterpiece of biblical progressive sanctification and is an indictment of the antinomians of his day and of ours. He puts out an “all points bulletin” for a true believer. The following eleven marks are the biblical characteristics that define all those who have truly experienced

¹⁴⁵ Charles Haddon Spurgeon. “Feeding the Sheep or Amusing the Goats?” Quoted in Frank G. Ciampa's *The Spirit of Reformation* (Xulon Press, 2007), 115.

¹⁴⁶ Karl Taro Greenfeld. “God Wants Me to be Rich” (*Portfolio Magazine*: August 2008 issue), 201.

the new birth.¹⁴⁷ We can trust them, because they come from an apostolic expert!

In 1746, Jonathan Edwards was in the midst of the Great Awakening. Hundreds were being saved around him. So he wrote *A Treatise Concerning the Religious Affections*. The book deals with the biblical evidences of true conversion. Many were criticizing this great revival. Some people were claiming to know Christ who had not truly been changed. Some said it was just an emotional roller coaster ride. Ok, they did not say that because there were no roller coasters then, but you understand.

Popular teaching at the time of the Great Awakening was that the prevalent proof of conversion was a feelings-based experience. There were many people that were merely seeking an experience. Edwards wrote against this. He said, "Assurance is never to be enjoyed on the basis of a past experience. There is need of the present and continuing work of the Holy Spirit...[in] giving assurance".¹⁴⁸

God's Fingerprints on the Believer

The Bible says in that we are God's "workmanship", his 'masterpiece' (Ephesians 2:10). Every master artist or craftsman has their secrets of beauty. In the book of 1 John, we have God's recipe book for a Christian. 1 John is the DNA map of a Christian. John gives us eleven marks of God's work in our lives. These are God's "fingerprints" on the believer.

¹⁴⁷ John MacArthur's writings have been especially helpful in guiding me through the exposition of 1 John. I have modified a few of the points, but for the most part, these eleven main points and some of the exposition and applications come directly out of his book: *Saved Without A Doubt* (David C. Cook Publications: Colorado Springs, 1992), 81-108.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 82.

The apostles were very concerned about Christians having assurance of salvation throughout their writings in the New Testament. John actually wrote an entire book that gives series of eleven identifiers of salvation. Just like the new twenty dollar bill has a number of security features, so these marks on the Christian's life are meant to give him joy and assurance that God has worked in his heart. The summary verse of the entire book is found in 1 John 5:13, "*I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God that you may know that you have eternal life.*" We can know that we are the Lord's by looking at His fingerprints upon our lives.

Mark 1: A True Christian Delights in the Intimate Fellowship of the Lord

Spiritual intimacy is absolutely necessary for the Christian. Every Christian has within the spiritual compulsion and hunger for God's holy presence. To look into the face of Jesus through prayer and the Word is a thrill! John says as much in his first chapter of 1 John, verses 3-4:

that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. And we are writing these things so that our joy may be complete.

The Fullness of Joy

Fullness of joy in assurance is possible through your intimate fellowship with the Father and the Son. How can we have the joy of assurance in someone we have not yet seen? Peter says: "*Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice*

with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory” (1 Peter 1:8). You can see assurance is not just an acknowledgment of information but a soul stirring delight in God’s presence. Paul speaks of this sweet fellowship in Philippians 3:10. He is not concerned with the cold facts alone, but a genuine experiential union with Christ. He explains how he has lost everything for Christ, but it is no matter to him. He has gained his heart’s desire by knowing Christ. He cries out:

... that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death...

Genuine believers crave deep and satisfying fellowship with Christ more than all the comforts and pleasures of the world. They constantly return to His throneroom and “*live in the heavenlies*”, because this brings them fullness of joy.

Jesus said in John 15:11, “*These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full.*” Christ’s joy is in us, because Christ is in us. We fellowship with Him. We are united with Him.

Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life (1 John 5:12).

Again, Jesus prays in His high priestly prayer before going to Gethsemane to die that our greatest joy and glory would be union and fellowship with Himself and His Father.

...that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me (John 17:21-23).

The Glory of Christ's Presence

Two things immediately stand out of this passage. First, the glory of Christ's presence is soul-satisfying. The glory that Christ has with the Father is given unto us. This is nothing less than the glory of His presence in perfect, unhindered union. This union of His glorious presence with our spirit is ours in Christ. Secondly, this glorious presence makes a difference in the life of a Christian, so much so that the outside world knows that the glory of His presence is within us. Verse 23, "*I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me.*" For the Christian, nothing in this world comes close to the joy of Christ's indwelling presence and satisfying fellowship.

Christ promises an abundant life for all Christians. False teachers tell us this means God will give you practically anything you want—health, wealth, prosperity, happiness. But when Christ said, "*I came that they may have life and have it abundantly*" (John 10:10), he was speaking of **spiritual life** that comes from union with Him. This intimate fellowship gives us comfort and the relief that we have been forgiven of our sins!

The Tabernacle of God with Men

We read at the very end of the Bible in Revelation 21:3 that God is going to dwell with us eternally in intimate fellowship. The Apostle John writes there,

And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and

they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God.

He will wipe away all your tears on that day. You will understand of the deep love God has for you, and His great compassion for you. You say, “Heaven’s a long way away. What about now?” In fact, Paul tells us we do not have to wait until heaven to experience this kind of intimate fellowship. He says in 2 Corinthians 6:16, “*For we are the temple of the living God; as God said ‘I will make my dwelling among them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.’*” He is the God we draw near to in time of trouble, like a shelter in the time of storm (Hebrews 4:16). We have “*a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul*” (Hebrews 6:19). That anchor is our union with Jesus Christ. He sends His Spirit into our hearts, and we cry out “*Abba, Father*” (Galatians 4:6). The true Christian delights in the intimate fellowship he has with the Lord. This is what makes our joy full.

Mark 2: A True Christian is Sensitive to Sin

If spiritual intimacy is like a drug for the Christian, then sin is like a cancer-causing food. All you want to do as a child of God is get rid of it—keep it as far away as possible. Look again at 1 John 1 and verse 5. John tells us something about God. “*This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that **God is light, and in him is no darkness at all.***” The wording here in the Greek is emphatic. It is a double negative and literally reads, “God is light and in him, NO, not a trace of darkness at all!” Verse 6 therefore says, “*If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie*

and do not practice the truth." A Christian is sensitive to sin because of his union with Christ. Someone said, "if you have a new relationship with God, then you have a new relationship with sin". And that relationship is one of enmity. We hate it. William Cowper, who assisted John Newton in writing the famous Olney hymnal, spoke for all true children of God in their attitude toward sin:

*Holy Lord God! I love Thy truth,
Nor dare Thy least commandment slight;
Yet pierced by sin, the serpent's tooth,
I mourn the anguish of the bite.*

*But though the poison lurks within,
Hope bids me still with patience wait;
Till death shall set me free from sin,
Free from the only thing I hate.*

*Had I a throne above the rest,
Where angels and archangels dwell;
One sin, unslain, within my breast,
Would make that Heav'n as dark as hell.*

*The prisoner, sent to breathe fresh air,
And blessed with liberty again,
Would mourn, were he condemned to wear
One link of all his former chain.*

*But O! no foe invades the bliss,
When glory crowns the Christian's head;
One view of Jesus as He is,
Will strike all sin forever dead.¹⁴⁹*

Lost People are Blind to Their Sin

Some people make some amazing claims. Have you ever been witnessing, and you ask them if they have told a lie, and

¹⁴⁹ William Cowper. "Holy Lord God! I Love Thy Truth" (London: *Olney Hymnal*, 1779).

they say, “Yeah, once or twice”. On several occasions I have had people tell me that they have never lied, stolen, taken God’s name in vain, or broken any of God’s commandments as far as they could remember. Or if they did, it must have been when they were just out of infancy! In fact, they can hardly remember if they have committed any sin. All the while they will take God’s name in vain while I am talking with them. For someone like that, John says, *“If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us”* (1 John 1:8). Then in verse 10 he makes it crystal clear, *“If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.”*

Because God is light and has shined in the Christian’s heart, he often will see more sin in his life, even though he has less sin in his life than the unbeliever. Now that you are saved, people think you are practically sinless, but you feel like Isaiah. You often say with him, *“Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts!”* (Isaiah 6:5).

You see, the closer you are to God, the more you see your sin. When you were lost, you thought you were ok. Today you look back, and you cannot comprehend how blind you were. Paul tells us in 2 Corinthians 4:6, *“For God, who said, ‘Let light shine out of darkness,’ has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.”*

True Believers Instead Walk in the Light

Our holy life is intrigal to our fellowship with other believers. John says, *“But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of*

Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin" (1 John 1:7). The holiness of God's people attract them to one another. Christ is in the midst of His people, cleansing them from all their sins as they are united together in Him in fellowship. Christians are not perfect. There is a need for confession of sin (1 John 1:9). A Christian at times fails God, but John makes it clear that he will take regular opportunity to confess and forsake his sins and maintain close fellowship with Christ and His people.

Our Advocate

We do not have the power to save ourselves, and neither do we have the power to sanctify ourselves. We must go to Christ our Advocate. Look at 1 John 2:1-2, "*My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world.*"

A popular hymn paints the dramatic picture:

*When Satan tempts me to despair,
And tells me of the guilt within,
Upward I look, and see him there
Who made an end of all my sin.
Because the sinless Savior died,
My sinful soul is counted free;
For God, the Just, is satisfied
To look on Him and pardon me.¹⁵⁰*

¹⁵⁰ Before the Throne of God Above, by Charitie Bancroft, 1863.

A Christian learns to go right back to the Cross when he sins. We had no righteousness of our own before we were saved, and we have none of our own after we are saved. It is all of Christ! Without Christ, the Christian is an undone sinner. The only thing that will kill our guilt is beholding the righteousness of Jesus Christ. He says, “*It is finished!*” (John 19:30). “*We have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous*”.

O Wretched Man that I am

As a Christian you make no excuses for your sins. You do not hide them. You are all too aware of them. Instead you cry out with Paul, “*Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?*” (Romans 7:24). The answer is: Jesus Christ will certainly deliver you. Without that hope we would all crumble under the weight of our weariness. If God has put that sensitivity to sin in your heart, then rejoice! He gave us salvation to enjoy it for His glory. There is nothing that glorifies God more than a forgiven sinner rejoicing in his salvation.

Richard Sibbes (1577-1635), one of the early Puritans, was stripped of his academic posts at St. John’s College at Cambridge for his desire for a more radical reformation. He was known for great spiritual power in his preaching. Sibbes understood the sensitivity Christians have toward sin. He said:

[The Christian] hate[s] sin universally; not one sin, but every kind of sin...Our hatred of sin may be discerned by our willingness to talk of it. He that hates a snake, or toad, will flee from it; so a man that truly abhors sin, will not endure to come near the occasions of it. What shall we say then of those that prostitute themselves to all sinful delights? As hatred of sin is

in our affection, so it will appear in our actions. Those that love to see sin acted [practiced] did never as yet truly loathe it.¹⁵¹

William Tyndale, martyr and translator of the Bible into the English language, articulated the Christian's fight against sin in his prologue to the book of Leviticus:

...all that repent, and believe in Christ, are saved from everlasting death, of pure grace, without, and before, their good works, and not to sin again, but to fight against sin...¹⁵²

Every true Christian has a sensitivity toward sin and has a bent in the new nature to avoid it. He says, "*I will not set before my eyes anything that is worthless. I hate the work of those who fall away; it shall not cling to me*" (Psalm 101:3). If you see this attitude and pattern in your life, you have reason to rejoice for the new birth God has wrought in you!

Mark 3: A True Christian Practices Righteousness as a Lifestyle

True believers delight in obeying God's Word. In 1 John 2:3, John says, "*And by this we know that we have come to know him, if we keep his commandments.*" The word "keep" in 1 John 2:3 speaks of watchful, thoughtful, careful obedience.¹⁵³ Jesus said in John 14:24, "*Whoever does not love me does not keep my words. And the word that you hear is not mine but the Father's who sent me*" (cf. Luke 6:46; Matthew 15:13; 2 Timothy 2:19).

¹⁵¹ Richard Sibbes, *Works*, Vol. 6, 54.

¹⁵² William Tyndale. "Prologue to the Third Book of Moses Called Leviticus" *Tyndale's Old Testament* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1996 reprint—originally published in 1534), 149.

¹⁵³ Spiros Zodhiates, *The Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament*. (Chattanooga: AMG Publishers, 2000), G5083.

The Test of Holy, Obedient, Submitted Living

The book of 1 John gives this test of obedient living multiple times. John is relentless in his demand that a genuine Christian bear the fruit of obedient, holy, submitted living. Consider the core passages of his letter of 1 John to the churches:

1:5-7, *“This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin.”*

2:1, 3-6, 24b, 29, *“My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin ... And by this we know that we have come to know him, if we keep his commandments. Whoever says “I know him” but does not keep his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him, but whoever keeps his word, in him truly the love of God is perfected. By this we may know that we are in him: whoever says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked ... If what you heard from the beginning abides in you, then you too will abide in the Son and in the Father ... If you know that he is righteous, you may be sure that everyone who practices righteousness has been born of him.”*

3:3, 6-10a, 24a, *“And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure ... No one who abides in him keeps on sinning; no one who keeps on sinning has either seen him or known him. Little children, let no one deceive you. Whoever practices righteousness is righteous, as he is righteous. Whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil, for the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason*

the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil. No one born of God makes a practice of sinning, for God's seed abides in him, and he cannot keep on sinning because he has been born of God. By this it is evident who are the children of God, and who are the children of the devil ... Whoever keeps his commandments abides in God, and God in him."

5:2-3, 18 "By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and obey his commandments. For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome... We know that everyone who has been born of God does not keep on sinning, but he who was born of God protects him, and the evil one does not touch him."

Do you have the power to say no to sin because of your desire to glorify God? Do you exhibit watchful, thoughtful, careful obedience through the leading of the Holy Spirit by God's Word? Have you experienced victory over sins that used to enslave you as a result of this Spirit-directed obedience to God's Word? Then rejoice. Only a true Christian can practice the righteousness of Christ from the heart.

Free Not to Sin

Some will say of the Christian life, "That is so restricting! How unreasonable to say that a Christian must practice a holy life". Actually, it is freeing—he *gets* to live righteously. He no longer has to live in sin like the rest of the world. He is free *not to sin*. He has the privilege and now the power to soar above the sin-cursed world through a holy life.

Righteous by Design

Instead of thinking of a Christian's righteousness in the category of morality, think of it in the category of nature or design. A Christian was created for holiness. John is talking about the new birth. A Christian was born/designed to live for Christ. When the baby fish (if we can call it that) is born from the mama fish, the baby fish is designed to swim. Birds are designed to fly. Worms are designed to crawl. Christians were designed to live in conformity to the perfect man, Jesus Christ.

To take it out of the biological realm and put it in the mechanical realm, Jay Adams gives the illustration of a train that is designed for train tracks in his pamphlet *Godliness through Discipline*:¹⁵⁴

When is a train most free? Is it when it goes bouncing across the field off the track? No. It is free only when it is confined (if you will) to the track. Then it runs smoothly and efficiently, because that was the way that its maker intended for it to run. It needs to be on the track, structured by the track, to run properly.

A train will be destroyed if it departs from the tracks. But in Christ, no longer are we broken down on the side of the tracks "dead in trespasses and sins" (Ephesians 2:1). We are freed and able to function as we were designed on the "tracks" of His Lordship.

Getting back to biology, when you take the bird out of the sky and swim the bird, you kill the bird. When you take the dog off the leash and drop him from the sky, you kill the dog. When you take the fish out of the water and walk the fish, you kill the fish. So the first humans, Adam and Eve, when they departed

¹⁵⁴ Jay Adams. *Godliness through Discipline* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing, 1972), 22-23.

from the design of their maker, they destroyed themselves (and all after them). Christians, through the new birth, are redeemed and redesigned with a new nature that soars above the sinful world in the righteousness of Christ, which is the "*perfect law, the law of liberty*" (James 1:25).

Righteousness for the Christian therefore is not restrictive but liberating. We are set free from sin. Like the fish wants to swim, and the bird wants to fly, and the dog wants to walk, the Christian desires to practice righteousness. It is not punishing for a dog to walk or a bird to fly or a fish to swim. It's what they *want* to do. It is not punishing and restrictive for the Christian to live a holy, disciplined life conformed to Christ's image. The Christian's deepest desire is to live in the power and righteousness of Christ. It is what his new life and new nature and new heart was designed for.

Divine Power for Godly Living

You may say that you lack the power to say no to sin. It is important to point out that no Christian lacks the power to put off sin in his life. Peter tells us that "*His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence*" (2 Peter 1:3). "*No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it*" (1 Corinthians 10:13).

Because of the resurrection power of Jesus that dwells within a believer, he has a deep compulsion to obey Christ. If it is your desire to obey God in the biggest and littlest of things, then rejoice. This is how we are assured that we know Him!

God is pleased when we experience “*fulness of joy*” because of His Spirit causing us to walk in His statutes.

How Does This Divine Power Work?

Paul actually says that God will “*quicken*” or put life into our bodies through His Spirit to put off sin and pursue a Christlike life. Listen to his words in Romans 8:10-14,

But 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. 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. For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.

Psalm 1:1-3 gives a real foundation for the Christian’s guidance into holiness. Upon his repentance, the believer begins to grow and change, because he rejects the counsel of the ungodly (verse 1) and begins to meditate on God’s sufficient Word day and night (verse 2). In time he bears spiritual fruit (verse 3). The Spirit’s role then is to illuminate the Word of God to the believer. This ministry of the Spirit of God is vital since the one without the Spirit deems the Word of God irrational (2 Corinthians 2:14) and can never grow and change in a way that pleases God.

Without this divine illumination and compulsion from the Spirit of God that leads us to walk in God’s pathway, we can have no assurance that we are God’s child. The prophet Ezekiel recorded this same truth six hundred years before the apostle

John was born. God explained how He would turn rebellious sinners into obedient saints. God promised: "*And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules*" (Ezekiel 36:27).

Those Who Practice Sin Do Not Love God

There are many around us that say, "I love God, I just don't live for Him". These people dispute the necessity of holy living as a proof of true regeneration. Millions who lack this power to change still continue professing to be Christians. John was concerned for these very people when he wrote I John 2:4: "*Whoever says 'I know him' but does not keep his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him*". To say that a person can love God without obedience is actually a contradiction. Jesus said in John 14:15, "*If you love me, you will keep my commandments.*" According to John, love for God is not equated with emotions and sentiments but with obedience. A person who is in love with God wants to do whatever He says. This is what John says will bring people unshakable assurance. "*[B]ut whoever keeps his word, in him truly the love of God is perfected. By this we may know that we are in him*" (1 John 2:5). How can we know that we are in Christ? Not by fleeting emotions, but by our desire to be perfectly in line with God's revealed will. Obedience truly is the very best way to show that you believe.

Of course obedience is not a test of the person's power, but the power of Christ within the believer. It is a great encouragement that as God commands us to be holy (Romans 12:1-2; 1 John 3:3; 2 Peter 3:18; Ephesians 5:1), He also gives us the power to grow and change. "*He who calls you is faithful; he will surely do it*" (1 Thessalonians 5:24). "*And I am sure of this,*

that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ” (Philippians 1:6). “[W]ho will sustain you to the end, guiltless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord” (1 Corinthians 1:8-9).

John Newton: I am Not What I Once Was

The new birth gives the true believer the inward compulsion and power to practice a life of righteousness. Does that mean a Christian can be sinlessly perfect? I have wished that this could be the case. Yet while the Christian will not arrive at entire sanctification in this life, he can say with John Newton (1725-1807), the former slave trader who was converted and wrote *Amazing Grace*:

I am not what I ought to be. I am not what I wish to be. I am not what I hope to be. Yet I can truly say, I am not what I once was. By the grace of God, I am what I am.¹⁵⁵

Mark 4: A True Christian Will Not Live for This Present Evil World

1 John tells us in 2:15-17:

Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride in possessions—is not from the Father but is from the world. And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever.

¹⁵⁵ John Newton. As quoted in Mark Dever’s *Nine Marks of a Healthy Church* (Wheaton: Good News Publishers, 2004), 104.

If you are a believer, you have rendered yourself dead to this world of sin. Specifically, you do not live for, and thereby worship the world's pleasures, possessions, and pride. The world offers a false happiness. We know that true happiness is found in our holy fellowship with Christ.

What does John mean by “Love not the World”?

What is the “world”. This phrase refers to the world system. We read in 2 Corinthians 4:4, “*the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers*”. There is an evil system of sin that is governed by the wicked one that the Bible calls “the world”, or in Greek, the *cosmos*. Ephesians 2:2-3 says, “*in which you once walked, following the course of this **world**, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience— among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.*”

This world system encompasses the way of the sinful life, and the way Satan rules in and through the hearts of unbelievers. It encompasses false religion, godless thinking, immorality, materialism, and sinful pleasures. It offers a counterfeit happiness. The pleasures of sin are but for a “*season*”, and then they turn to bitterness. Jesus said whoever sins is “*the slave of sin*” (John 8:34, NKJV). Sin is slavery! So we reject the wicked one's offers that come from all that this world offers.

Clement, one of early Christians, pastor of the church at Rome, and friend of the Apostle Peter, wrote to the Corinthian church around 96AD:

This world and the world to come are two enemies. This one means adultery, corruption, avarice, and deceit, while the

other gives them up. We cannot, then, be friends of both. To get the one, we must give the other up. We think that it is better to hate what is here, for it is trifling, transitory, and perishable, and to value what is there--things good and imperishable.¹⁵⁶

Traps vs. Treasures

The Christian does not have a heart that latches on to all the temporary pride and pleasures and possessions that are passing away. We can get trapped, but we see it as a trap, not as a treasure. The uncovered heart is attracted by trifles and toys. To the lost person, the world is filled with treasures, not traps. Christ's people know that all these things pass away. We live in light of the Day of Redemption when we shall inherit a new heaven and earth. We live for the City of God, a city not made with hands, whose builder and maker is God.

Thomas à Kempis rightly observed, "How quickly the glory of the world passes away!"¹⁵⁷ He went on to say, "He is truly wise who looks upon all earthly things as folly that he may gain Christ".¹⁵⁸

Who won this year's Super Bowl? You may remember. There was much fanfare and glory. Who won it ten years ago? We will all soon forget this world's glories.

A Christian's heart is not turned toward this world's glories, and it is certainly is not given to this world's evil. Christians do not love this world, but live for another world entirely. I John

¹⁵⁶ Cyril C. Richardson, ed. *Early Christian Fathers* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), 195.

¹⁵⁷ Thomas à Kempis. *The Imitation of Christ*. Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, 1996.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

5:19 says, *“And we know that we are of God, and the whole world lieth in wickedness [or, the wicked one]”*.

We are “in” the World, but not “of” the World

Of course, when we become believers, we do not move into monasteries and convents. We still live and work in the world. Most of the time the world looks at true Christians and thinks they are fanatical. That is because we are IN the world, but not *of* the world. Jesus explained it in John 17:14-16, *“I have given them your word, and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one. They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world.”*

We are not of this world, but we must be very careful. Christians can and do get sucked into the traps of the temporary pride and pleasures and possessions of this world that is passing away. We must daily surrender ourselves as living sacrifices to live for another world—to *“seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you”* (Matthew 6:33). As long as we set our *“seek the things that are above”* (Colossians 3:1), we will not fall into the snares of this world's treasures, pleasures, and pride.

What joy the assurance of our salvation brings! Rejoice if there is a hostility in you toward the world. That is the Spirit of God in you!

Mark 5: A True Christian Openly Confesses the Person and Lordship of Jesus Christ

1 John 2:23, *“No one who denies the Son has the Father. Whoever confesses the Son has the Father also.”*

1 John 4:15, *“Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God.”*

1 John 5:1, *“Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God, and everyone who loves the Father loves whoever has been born of him.”*

Jesus essentially said the same thing, *“So everyone who acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven, but whoever denies me before men, I also will deny before my Father who is in heaven”* (Matthew 10:32-33).

A true believer not only believes that Jesus of Nazareth is the Christ, the Ancient of Days come in human flesh to redeem guilty sinners, but each believer has the deep desire to confess the Person of Jesus Christ boldly. The Apostle Paul said in Romans 10:9, *“because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.”* Many defame Christ by taking His Name in vain or by making light of Him, or by lowering His person to that merely of a good teacher and nothing more. Others deny He ever existed. No genuine Christian can stand for the Name of Christ to be degraded. The born again child of God wants to confess Jesus Christ.

The core truth of the words of Christ and later of John and Paul are that the genuinely converted person will acknowledge His Redeemer to all. Some who say they are Christians excuse themselves from confessing Christ by claiming their relationship with Him is so personal that they need not confess Him. If we embrace Christ in our inmost hearts, we will want to confess Him before the world. Those who are in Christ find it their greatest delight to confess Him who delivered their souls from eternal damnation and given them freedom from

slavery to sin. The One who loosed us from our sins and condemnation also loosed our tongues to confess Him before all. For the Christian, to confess Christ is sweeter than life. Many martyrs and church leaders of the past have demonstrated this. With Luther the Christian says when he is poked and prodded by verbal assaults: "Here I stand, I cannot do otherwise".¹⁵⁹

In our day of pluralistic religion, it is of utmost importance for the Christian to confess that Jesus is the Christ, the exclusive way to the Father. He is "*the way, and the truth, and the life*" no one can come to the Father except through Him (John 14:6). The true believer finds delight in confessing Christ even though it means at times He suffers scorn and reproach for the Name of Christ.

Mark 6: A True Christian Eagerly Awaits Christ's Return

If you are a true believer, you are going to have a great amount of hope in your heart. You are not living for this present world. We can see that the whole attitude of this world is here and now. We hear things like:

"Save the planet."

"Live your best life now."

"Live a longer and healthier life."

There are diet crazes and fitness crazes. Of course we want to be good stewards of our body, but there is almost a worship of health today. Why is that? Because people are *afraid to die*.

The Christian on the other hand lives for Christ's kingdom. We are laying up treasure in heaven. John says that true believ-

¹⁵⁹ Martin Luther. As quoted in Roland Bainton's *Here I stand—A Life of Martin Luther* (New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 2007), 185.

ers are not obsessed with the lust of the flesh (pleasures), the lust of the eyes (possessions) and the pride of life (popularity) (1 John 2:15-17), but instead their hope, the thing they are looking forward to more than anything is the Second Coming of Christ. Do you eagerly await Christ's Second Coming?

Christ's Coming Gives us Cause for Rejoicing

Our present reality causes us to rejoice. "*Beloved, we are God's children now...*" (1 John 3:2a). What an amazing statement. We are the children of God. We deserve to be forsaken, but God has not forsaken us. He has made us His own dear children. We are "*heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ*" (Romans 8:17). Christ died to make this possible, and when He comes again it will be reality. All our sins are forgiven. We are presently justified before the holy God of the universe. Christ is pleading our case. He is our Advocate. "*Beloved, we are God's children now ...*"

But it gets better. Not only is our present reality amazing, our future reality is beyond comprehension. John says, "*...what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is*" (1 John 3:2b). We shall be like Jesus! Our unsaved neighbors are looking for the next great thing in fashion or among the celebrities or the movies or games or technology or the next great job opportunity. As Christians, we want to use all that God gives us for the glory of God (including how we dress, our technology, our job, our family), but our great focus is the return of Christ. The focus is so consuming that it will actually purify the one who hopes in His return. We are very soon going to see Jesus, our Great God and Saviour, face to face.

Specific Reasons for Rejoicing

There are many reasons we can rejoice as we consider the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. At Christ's coming, you will not only meet Jesus, you will meet all the saints of old and precious family that have passed on before you. We shall see at that moment the entire elect of God from all the ages together in one. We shall know as we are known of Him. You will know each of your loved ones perfectly. At the same time you will recognize the patriarchs and the prophets. Paul, whose body was stoned and flogged and who endured such physical abuse for Christ will have a restored body. Isaiah who was "sawn asunder" will be completely whole. We shall all have glorified bodies, and we shall be the one Church united! The Bride shall wed the Bridegroom. We will commence the marriage supper of the Lamb. Right now we "*see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face*" (1 Corinthians 13:12). What a day that will be. But there are other reasons to rejoice.

You will never sin again. You ought to love His appearing because at that moment of His coming, He will create a new heaven and earth. The curse of sin will be forever removed, and sin shall be no more!

You will never have another bad day for all of eternity.

You will never go to another funeral. "*He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away*" (Revelation 21:4).

You will never feel pain again, or have another surgery or need another doctor, or take another pill, or wonder about what part of your body is going to go out next. There is coming a day when the Lord "*will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body*" (Philippians 3:21). "*[I]n a moment, in the twin-*

klung of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed” (1 Corinthians 15:52). God will bring us finally into His presence, and He shall be our God and we shall be His people (Revelation 21:3). Rejoice, for “what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is” (1 John 3:2b). If this gives you great joy, then rejoice, this is apostolic evidence of a true child of God.

Apprehensions of Christ’s Coming

Now we all have apprehensions of Christ’s coming. Paul spoke of apprehensions of leaving this world. Consider his words in Philippians 1:21-25,

For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me. Yet which I shall choose I cannot tell. I am hard pressed between the two. My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better. But to remain in the flesh is more necessary on your account. Convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with you all, for your progress and joy in the faith, so that in me you may have ample cause to glory in Christ Jesus, because of my coming to you again.

Like Paul, we too have apprehensions. We want to see more people saved—our friends, our loved ones, our children. We want to bear more fruit for Christ. We want to see new believers established. We want to see maturing believers turn into mentoring believers, who in turn will mentor others. God also has a desire to hold off Christ’s coming. We are told that He “*is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that*

all should reach repentance" (2 Peter 3:9). He delays Christ's coming because He is patiently drawing His elect people. He wants to see His Bride completed.

Christ's Coming Gives us a Cause for Readiness

John is clear that the knowledge of Christ's coming ought to make us get ready for eternity. "*And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure*" (1 John 3:3).

A.W. Tozer commented on his day and age when people were so curious about end time events. He spoke of a danger with so much curiosity and not very much readiness for Christ's coming.

Are you ready for the appearing of Jesus Christ or are you among those who are merely curious about His coming?

Let me warn you that many preachers and Bible teachers will answer to God some day for encouraging curious speculations about the return of Christ and failing to stress the necessity for "loving His appearing"¹⁶⁰

Peter says the exact same thing as John in 2 Peter. We normally think of the Apocalypse as John's book of Revelation, but in the early church they called the book of 2 Peter "The Apocalypse of Peter".

In the last fifty years, it seems pastors have been more concerned about charts and diagrams and figuring the end out. This was not the intention of God in giving us the doctrine of Christ's coming. Christ's coming should cause holiness, not speculation. Peter's Apocalypse is very clear about the need for readiness for Christ's return. God gave us this revelation so that

¹⁶⁰ A.W. Tozer. *I Call It Heresy* (Camp Hill, PA: WingSpread, 1991), 166.

we would not hang on to the things of this world but instead live holy and pure lives, knowing that soon we will see God face to face.

Consider Peter's account of how time will end:

The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance. But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed (2 Peter 3:9-10).

Christ came once to take away sin, but when He comes a second time, he shall destroy the world that crucified Him. And what is Peter's conclusion as to how we should respond to the soon appearing of our Lord in the eastern sky?

Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of people ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness, waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be set on fire and dissolved, and the heavenly bodies will melt as they burn! But according to his promise we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells. Therefore, beloved, since you are waiting for these, be diligent to be found by him without spot or blemish, and at peace (2 Peter 3:11-14).

Genuine believers are those who strive to be ready, doing their best by God's grace to live a holy life. We want godliness to characterize our every thought, deed, and choice. We are those who are "waiting" and "diligent" to be found "without spot or blemish, and at peace". Does this characterize your life? Are you ready for and rejoicing in our Lord's second coming? Are

you eagerly anticipating his appearing? If so, you should have great hope that you are indeed a child of God.

We see the same pattern of the need for readying our souls for Christ's coming in 1 Peter 1:13-14:

Therefore, preparing your minds for action, and being sober-minded, set your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ. As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance...

Peter says that Christ's revelation from the sky ought to cause us to "gird up the loins" of our mind. In Peter's day, men wore long robes that hindered them if they needed to run. Their robes could easily get caught on a rock or a briar bush. To prevent that, they would need to "gird up the loins" of their robe so they could travel unhindered. In the same way, our thoughts are often flying loose into places that can hinder our walk with Christ. We have the temptation to live according to our former life style. We need to "gird up the loins" of our mind and live seriously in the light of Christ's soon return to the earth.

Paul tells us in 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17,

For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord.

He says again in 1 Corinthians 15:52 that Christ will come in a split second—

[I]n a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed.

The glorious appearing of Jesus Christ has a powerful effect on our lives. We see this again in Titus 2:11-13:

For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ...

We must not be slack. We ought not make excuses. We should lead by example. There is a world to be reached before Christ comes again. It behooves us to continue in holiness as we will all give an account. The “*blessed hope*” of Christ’s coming will motivate us to Christlikeness until the day when we shall finally “*be like Him*” in the beauty of His holiness.

Christ’s Coming Causes us to Anticipate Reward

Paul’s last words before he went to be with Christ were written to Timothy probably from the famous Mamertine prison in Rome. You could not see the Mamertine prison because it was an underground dungeon of sorts. The hole was only large enough for one man to fit through and the top was covered with bars.

Paul could not write, for his wrists were chained to a wall underneath the ground, so he would have dictated his letter. Demas had forsaken him because of his love for the present age. Paul was alone except for Luke. Onesiphorus would come

by from time to time, but by this time, he too was gone. Who inscribed Paul's final letter? We do not know, but his words are in no way disheartening but filled with joy and anticipation. He tells Timothy that he is expecting a reward that all Christians will receive. What exactly is that reward? Paul writes:

Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that Day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved his appearing (2 Timothy 4:8).

The greatest wonder of the coming of Christ according to Paul at his life's end is that we shall receive the crown of Christ's imputed righteousness. We shall be as righteous as Christ is righteous. Our sins are drown in the depth of the deepest sea. Psalm 103:12, "*as far as the east is from the west, □ so far does he remove our transgressions from us.*" The reward that all believers anticipate is the righteous robe of Jesus Christ. At the moment of His coming sin will be forever eradicated and we who were born wretched sinners will be received into the presence of our holy God and Saviour, crowned with His imputed righteousness by faith in Him.

All genuine believers can say in their heart of hearts: "*He who testifies to these things says, "Surely I am coming soon." Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!*" (Revelation 22:20).

Mark 7: A True Christian Has a Deep Affection for Other Christians

John tells us how to discern the difference between God's children and the children of Satan.

By this it is evident who are the children of God, and who are the children of the devil: whoever does not practice

righteousness is not of God, nor is the one who does not love his brother (1 John 3:10-11).

Christ Himself had said earlier to the apostle John and the other eleven disciples, “*By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another*” (John 13:35). It is easy to profess Christ, but this mark of love is the proof of saving faith. So powerful is love that to love is to fulfill the entire spirit of the law (Romans 13:10). Without this mark I cannot claim that God lives inside me. The mark is evident to all around us, for if I have not love, I am become as sounding brass or a noisy cymbal. I could have the gift of prophecy, understand all mysteries, and have faith to remove mountains, but if I have not love, I am nothing (I Corinthians 13:1-2, paraphrase). The children of God are manifested by the deep love they have for their brothers and sisters in Christ.

Where Does Love Come From?

“*God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us*” (Romans 5:5). Love comes from God, and the only way a human being can love is if God dwells in Him. “*Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God*” (1 John 4:7). Christians are “*taught by God to love one another,*” (1 Thessalonians 4:9).

What Does Love Look Like?

What does love look like practically? The biblical description of love is found in 1 Corinthians 13:4-7,

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 at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

This kind of agape love in the Christian is certainly manifested by the fruit of the Spirit. We think of the fruit of the Spirit as ninefold, but truly it is love which has eight angles. Donald Barnhouse put it this way:

Joy is love singing,
 Peace is love resting,
 Long-suffering is love enduring,
 Gentleness is love's true touch,
 Goodness is love's character,
 Faith is love's habit,
 Meekness is love's self-forgetfulness, and
 Temperance is love's holding the reigns.¹⁶¹

This love is the outworking of the indwelling Spirit of God, for "God is love". If He who is love dwells in us then love is the proof of His presence.

J.C. Ryle in his well loved book *Holiness* gave eight marks of love. He asks: "How do we know whether we love any person here upon earth? In what way and manner does love show itself between people in this world-between husband and wife-between parent and child-between brother and sister-between friend and friend? Let these questions be answered by common sense and observations, and I ask no more. Let these questions

¹⁶¹ F.F. Bruce. *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians* (Grand Rapids: MI: Eerdmans, 1984), 305.

be honestly answered, and the knot before us is untied. How does affection show itself among ourselves?"¹⁶² The following are the marks of how every Christian will love Christ.

(1) If we love a person, we like to think about him. We do not need to be reminded of him. We do not forget his name, or his appearance, or his character, or his opinions, or his tastes, or his position, or his occupation. He comes up before our mind's eye many a time in the day...

(2) If we love a person, we like to hear about him. We find a pleasure in listening to those who speak of him. We feel an interest in any report which others make of him. We are all attention when others talk about him and describe his ways, his sayings, his doings, and his plans. Some may hear him mentioned with utter indifference, but our own hearts bound within us at the very sound of his name...

(3) If we love a person, we like to read about him. What intense pleasure a letter from an absent husband gives to a wife, or a letter from an absent son to his mother. Others may see little worth notice in the letter. They can scarcely take the trouble to read it through. But those who love the writer see something in the letter which no one else can...

(4) If we love a person, we like to please him. We are glad to consult his tastes and opinions, to act upon his advice, and do the things which he approves...

(5) If we love a person, we like his friends. We are favorably inclined to them, even before we know them. We are drawn to them by the common tie of common love to one and the same person. When we meet them we do not feel that we are altogether strangers. There is a bond of union between us. They love the person that we love, and that alone is an introduction.

¹⁶² John Charles Ryle. *Holiness*. (London: James Clarke, 1952), 68.

Well, it is just so between the true Christian and Christ! The true Christian regards all Christ's friends as his friends, members of the same body, children of the same family, soldiers in the same army, travelers to the same home...

(6) If we love a person, we are jealous about his name and honor. We do not like to hear him spoken against without speaking up for him and defending him. We feel bound to maintain his interests and his reputation. We regard the person who treats him ill with almost as much disfavor as if he had ill-treated us. Well, it is just so between the true Christian and Christ. The true Christian regards with a godly jealousy all efforts to disparage his Master's word, or name, or Church, or day...

(7) If we love a person, we like to talk to him. We tell him all our thoughts, and pour out all our heart to him. We find no difficulty in discovering subjects of conversation. However silent and reserved we may be to others, we find it easy to talk to a much-loved friend...

(8) Finally, if we love a person, we like to be always with him. Thinking, and hearing, and reading, and occasionally talking are all well in their way. But when we really love people we want something more. We long to be always in their company. We wish to be continually in their society, and to hold communion with them without interruption or farewell. Well, it is just so between the true Christian and Christ...¹⁶³

¹⁶³ Ibid.

The Definition of Love: an event

What is love? Today love has been wrongly defined. Its lofty attributes have been minimized. Love has been defined by mere niceness and respect. It has been defined as mere emotional passion or romance. Some have even described love as a commitment. Yet none of these definitions rise to the level of true biblical love. Love instead is described by an event: the occasion of the crucifixion of God upon a Cross.

❧

“Love is willing self-sacrifice for the redemptive good of another that doesn't demand reciprocation or that the person being loved is deserving.”

PAUL DAVID TRIPP



In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins (1 John 4:10).

God the Father taught us to love by sending His Son. Paul Tripp gives an excellent definition of the practice of Christian love that points directly to the Saviour's demonstration of love on the Cross.

You don't define love through a set of abstract concepts. You define love according to what God did. Love is willing self-sacrifice for the redemptive good of another that doesn't demand reciprocation or that the person being loved is deserving.¹⁶⁴

¹⁶⁴ Paul David Tripp. "Diagnosis and Deliverance in This Deadly War of Words" (Minneapolis, MN: Desiring God Conference, 27 September 2008).

How is this kind of love even possible? It is certainly not a natural reflex in any human being. It is only possible when human beings go to the cross and embrace Jesus Christ as God and Saviour. Christ abides in the believer's soul. At the moment of regeneration His divine love begins flowing out of the believer. The Christian may at times need to stir up and kindle his love for Christ, but that love is ever present in the Christian because Christ is ever present. As Tripp said,

If you are God's child the power to live according to love is already in your storehouse. This is not a future "will be." It's a redemptive present "is"! He has given us everything we need for life and godliness so that we have access to it today.¹⁶⁵

And so the true believer in Christ defines love by the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. Contrary to the world's misconception of love, a person can love and feel horrible at the same time, because love is not a feeling. Love is fully manifested in a denial of self made possible by the indwelling Christ who was crucified for us. Even as John says, "*By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers*" (1 John 3:16).

The Christian's Desire: Fellowship with All Those Indwelt by Christ

The love flowing from the believer towards other believers is the evidence that he is indwelt with the presence of Christ. "*In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live*

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

through him” (1 John 4:9). The Christian can say with Paul, “*Christ...lives in me*” (Galatians 2:20).

Without the love of Christ in the heart, a person is still dead in His sins and has no right to call himself a child of God.

Because Christ lives in us, we love all who are indwelt by Him. John says that the person who can hate his Christian brother is blind and walks in darkness.

Whoever says he is in the light and hates his brother is still in darkness. Whoever loves his brother abides in the light, and in him there is no cause for stumbling. But whoever hates his brother is in the darkness and walks in the darkness, and does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded his eyes (1 John 2:9-11).

A genuine Christian has a deep affection for Christians and loves the fellowship of the saints. Christians love to be in the presence of others who like themselves are also indwelt by Christ. “*Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God, and everyone who loves the Father loves whoever has been born of him*” (1 John 5:1).

Because of his deep affection for his brothers and sisters in Christ, the true believer will go out of his way to worship with other Christians, help other Christians, be hospitable to traveling preachers and missionaries, and give of his time and effort in the local church using his gifting for the building up of the Body of Christ. In other words, there is a *commitment* to other Christians just as there is a commitment in all healthy relationships (husband-wife, employer-employee, teacher-student).

A true believer loves the fellowship of the saints and the teaching of the Word of God. He becomes consistent and

dependable in the attendance of the church's assemblies out of pure love for Christ and his Christian brothers. He loves Christians everywhere and senses a close bond with them, even if he has just met them.

Mark 8: A True Christian Suffers Rejection Because of His Faith

Every true Christian should expect that his new pattern of life will be rejected in some way by the world. The apostle John says we should not be surprised: "*Do not be surprised, brothers, that the world hates you*" (1 John 3:13). Jesus said, "*If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you*" (John 15:18).

Following Jesus Comes with a Price

Jesus taught us that following Him comes with a price. That price is a thorough rejection by those who do not know Him.

Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. And a person's enemies will be those of his own household. Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. And whoever does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it (Matthew 10:34-39).

The well-known church historian who was President of the Theological Seminary in Geneva Switzerland, Jean Henri Merle d'Aubigné, is very helpful in his description of the true believer's trial of faith after he begins confessing Christ. Unconverted family and friends are often those who oppose the new change. Many turn against the Christian because of his faith. D'Aubigné explains:

"Think not," Jesus Christ Himself replies, "that I am come to send peace on earth. I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother!" Yes, if your conversion be a real one, if you truly confess Jesus Christ, "think not" to escape from this universal rule. It is very true that the object of Christ was not to bring a sword; yet such has invariably been the effect of His coming wherever He has appeared. And how could it be otherwise? Look at the facts which occur around you. The Gospel has affected the heart of a certain person of your acquaintance (perhaps your own heart). It has effected a radical change, which is visible in the whole tenor of the life of this new Christian. This change inevitably draws the attention of his friends; and, in view of this work of God, they are driven to this alternative--either to undergo it themselves, or to condemn it in him. Unwilling to adopt the former, they choose the latter; they condemn the conversion of their friend as an unreasonable, enthusiastic, fanatical, methodistical measure.¹⁶⁶

The Godly Suffer Persecution

Each year, lists come out of the most popular people in the world. I always scratch my head when professing Christian leaders make the list. I cannot see Paul on one of those lists had

¹⁶⁶ Jean Henri d'Aubigné. *Discourses and Essays* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1855), 148.

they existed in his day. He taught us that we should have a different expectation. “*Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted*” (2 Timothy 3:12). In spite of the Christian’s mindset to “*lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way*” (1 Timothy 2:2), there are times when opposition to Christ will come from the least expected places. D. L. Moody put it best:

The man that is popular with the world is not a friend of Jesus. You cannot serve two masters. The world hates Christ, and if you are a friend of the world you cannot be a friend of His. You may be sure that something is wrong with you when everybody is your friend.¹⁶⁷

A true believer’s life seems to attract persecution because it is a radical life. What reaction do you get when you enter the dark room of a sleeping person and turn all the lights on? Do they run up immediately to thank you? To the contrary, they do all in their power to turn the light off! This is why Paul says, “*all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted*” (2 Timothy 3:12). Like the guy sleeping in the dark room, people are blinded by the light. They do not understand the light until God adjusts their eyes. A person who is truly born from above lives a radically holy life. We do not turn the light on or off based on popularity or convenience. The light is always on. We are walking in the light, persevering progressively in holiness until the end. The true child of God understands that this is not a popular way to live.

¹⁶⁷ D. L. Moody. *The Greatest Sermons Ever Preached* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2005), 180.

The Godly Should Rejoice

Each son of Adam is born into this world as the enemy of God, a child of disobedience and wrath. The nations rage against God (Psalm 2:1). If the world hates God, we should not marvel if it hates us who are indwelt by Him. Indeed, Jesus said all true believers should rejoice when persecution comes:

Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you (Matthew 5:11-12).

Mark 9: A True Christian Experiences Answered Prayer

One who is genuinely born again has such a union and closeness with the Lord that he is constantly breathing out prayers to God and seeing those prayers answered on a continual basis. The Apostle John explains this:

Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence before God; and whatever we ask we receive from him, because we keep his commandments and do what pleases him (1 John 3:21-22).

I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God that you may know that you have eternal life. And this is the confidence that we have toward him, that if we ask anything according to his will he hears us. And if we know that he hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests that we have asked of him (1 John 5:13-15).

A Christian has open lines of communication with God because He has now been reconciled with Him. No longer is he an enemy, a child of disobedience, or a child of wrath. He is now an heir of God. He cries out "*Abba, Father*". Often Christians forget our Lord wondrous promise to answer our prayers. John MacArthur reminds us of the heart of God:

God is more eager to answer the prayers of His children than they are to ask. I suspect there's a certain disappointment in God's heart because He would do so much more than we ever ask Him to do. Think of the blessings and assurance we miss out on!¹⁶⁸

Bible Promises

We find God's promises to answer the prayers of His people throughout the Bible.

Call to me and I will answer you, and will tell you great and hidden things that you have not known (Jeremiah 33:3).

[P]ray without ceasing (1 Thessalonians 5:17).

Seek the Lord while he may be found; □ call upon him while he is near (Isaiah 55:6).

Ask, and it will be given to you (Matthew 7:7).

Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation (Mark 14:38).

Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving (Colossians 4:2).

Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need (Hebrews 4:16).

¹⁶⁸John MacArthur. *Saved with out a Doubt*, (1992), 100.

The Basic Pattern of the Christian's Life

Not only does Paul tell us to “pray without ceasing” (1 Thessalonians 5:17); it is the Christian’s deepest desire to do so and the pattern of his life.

It is God’s indwelling Spirit, the Comforter, who compels the Christian to pray instead of fret in times of great trial. As J. C. Ryle (1816-1900), the uncompromising Anglican bishop of the nineteenth century, says,

Just as the first sign of life in an infant when born into the world is the act of breathing, so the first act of men and women when they are born again is praying. This is one of the common marks of all the elect of God. “They cry day and night unto him” (Luke 18:7). The Holy Spirit, who makes them new creatures, works in them the feeling of adoption, and makes them cry, ‘Abba, Father’ (Romans 8:15)... It is as much a part of their new nature to pray as it is of a child to cry. They see their need of mercy and grace. They feel their emptiness and weakness. They cannot do otherwise than they do. They must pray.¹⁶⁹

One of the greatest sources of assurance for a Christian is a pattern of answered prayer in his life. James says “*You do not have, because you do not ask*” (James 4:2). Fundamentally, if you are connected to God by the new birth, you will have answered prayer. God is a prayer answering God. God is not reluctant toward any one of His children. If God cares for the little sparrow, how much more will he hear your cry if you know Him?

¹⁶⁹ J.C. Ryle. Quoted in J.I. Packer's *Praying* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 16.

Do you have your prayers answered? Is this a pattern in your life? If so, this is an evidence that you have been born of God and have eternal life.

Mark 10: A True Christian Discerns Between Truth and Error

From the moment we are saved, true Christians are clear on who Jesus Christ is, otherwise we would not and could not be saved. The test is not through our feelings or through some mystical sense, but through the objective teaching of the Word of God. If someone denies any aspect of Christ's person and work, he is not from God. John makes this clear:

Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world. By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you heard was coming and now is in the world already (1 John 4:1-3).

True believers have the God-given discernment capability to tell when someone is teaching falsely about the person and work of Jesus Christ. A person without God's indwelling presence cannot discern the things of the Spirit of God (1 Corinthians 2:14) and is often drawn into error.

There are many false teachers in our day that hover just under the radar screen. T.D. Jakes is a Oneness Pentecostal who denies the Trinity and teaches the heresy of *modalism*, i.e. the Father is the Son and the Spirit. The persons of the Godhead are not distinct persons in Jakes' theology. John

Sanders and Clark Pinnock teach the heresy of *evangelical inclusivism*, i.e. that Jesus is not the exclusive way to the Father. They believe that Muslims, atheists, Buddhists, etc., will all be saved through Jesus Christ on Judgment Day if they have followed the light around them while they were on earth.¹⁷⁰ Many who claim to be evangelical Christian teachers are nothing more than wolves in sheep's clothing. Joyce Meyer, Kenneth Copeland, and others from the Word of Faith movement teach that Jesus Christ ceased to be God while He was on the cross among many, many other well-documented heresies.¹⁷¹

A true Christian has his eye out for false teaching. Some professing Christians will accept anyone who has claimed the name of Christ, whether they be Mormons, Jehovah's witnesses, Oneness Pentecostals, or inclusivists. The list of heresies could be cataloged in an entire book.

¹⁷⁰ Some who have been influenced by *evangelical inclusivism* to one degree or another are Robert Schuller of the Crystal Cathedral, and even the famous evangelist Billy Graham. Graham's public expression of his beliefs were like a bombshell to many in the evangelical world in 1978. Here is an excerpt from a popular magazine at that time:

"I used to play God," he acknowledged, "but I can't do that any more. I used to believe that pagans in far-off countries were lost—were going to hell—if they did not have the Gospel of Jesus Christ preached to them. I no longer believe that," he said carefully. "I believe that there are other ways of recognizing the existence of God—through nature, for instance—and plenty of other opportunities therefore, of saying 'yes' to God." ("I Can't Play God Any More," *McCalls*, January 1978, p. 156).

In 1985, Graham was frighteningly unclear about the salvation of those outside of Christ. Los Angeles reporter David Colker asked Graham: "What about people of other faiths who live good lives but don't profess a belief in Christ?" Graham replied: "I'm going to leave that to the Lord. He'll decide that" (*Los Angeles Herald Examiner*, 7/22/1985).

¹⁷¹ See Hank Hanegraaff. *Christianity in Crisis* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 1993).

A true believer will not deviate into the heresies that assault the person and work of Jesus Christ. John makes this clear:

They are from the world; therefore they speak from the world, and the world listens to them. We are from God. Whoever knows God listens to us; whoever is not from God does not listen to us. By this we know the Spirit of truth and the spirit of error (1 John 4:5-6).

John MacArthur makes some helpful comments on this passage:

It's good to be a believer, but it's also good to be skeptical. As John says, "Do *not* believe every spirit" (4:1, emphasis added). For the sake of your spiritual life and health, don't believe everything you hear, see, and read. Instead, "Test the spirits to see whether they are from God." That requires the ability to think biblically. The Greek text implies conducting a rigorous, ongoing examination of whatever and whomever you expose yourself to. Why go to all that trouble? "Because many false prophets have gone out into the world."¹⁷²

You do not need a Ph.D. in Bible to have the discernment to detect false teaching. The Apostle John says you simply need to be born again!

Mark 11: A True Christian Experiences the Comforting Presence of the Holy Spirit

"By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit" (1 John 4:13).

The true Christian is God's very own child. Through the working of the Spirit of God in our hearts we have the

¹⁷²John MacArthur. *Saved Without a Doubt* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1992), 105.

assurance that we are the children of God. Paul says “*God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, “Abba! Father!”*” (Galatians 4:6). It is Christ that lives in us and cries out through our heart, “*Abba, Father*”. We used to be ruled by the “*the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience*” (Ephesians 2:2), but now God is your Father! You can cry to Him “*Abba, Father*”. Now we have “*received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, “Abba! Father!”*” (Romans 8:15).

It is through the Spirit of God that we can believe and repent. He gives us a new heart and a new spirit by His Spirit (Ezekiel 36:26-27). Through the Spirit, Christ’s presence is within me, and He says, “*I will never leave you nor forsake you*” (Hebrews 13:5). What comfort this is for the true Christian.

Comfort that We are God’s Possession

The Spirit gives us confidence and assurance that God is our Father, and that we are no longer enemies of God but spiritually united and adopted into God’s family. Romans 8:16, “*The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God...*” What a friendship we have with the Holy Spirit!

The Spirit gives us assurance that we are God’s possession for He puts His seal of ownership on us. Ephesians 4:30, “*And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.*” God has taken possession of me by the Spirit of God. He’s given me the Holy Spirit who is as Ephesians 1:14 says, “*who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory.*” Christ purchased your soul with His own blood and then gave

you part of your inheritance, which is the Holy Spirit. 1 Peter 1:18-19 tells us that we “*were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot.*” The Spirit of God is the first installment of my eternal inheritance. He has taken possession of me. But one day, on the Day of Redemption, He is taking *full* possession of me.

If you have these signs of the Spirit, then rejoice. You will share the eternal glories of heaven as a joint heir with Christ. You will walk the new earth and see a creation without the curse of sin! A true Christian experiences the comforting presence of the Holy Spirit.

Closing Words from Spurgeon

You may say you are a Christian, but without these eleven marks you are an illegitimate child, your father is still the devil. You must be born again! Listen to the words of Charles Haddon Spurgeon. He said:

“If your life is unholy, then your heart is unchanged, and you are an unsaved person. The Savior will sanctify His people, renew them, give them a hatred of sin, and a love of holiness. The grace that does not make a man better than others is a worthless counterfeit. Christ saves His people, not *in* their sins, but *from* their sins. Without holiness, no man shall see the Lord.”¹⁷³

Does your heart burn with in you for holiness? Do you delight in the law of Christ from your inner man? Do you burn

¹⁷³ Charles Spurgeon. *Evening by Evening* (Whitaker House: New Kensington, PA, 1984), 41.

to do Christ's will? If not, you may be a "carnal Christian" which is no Christian at all.



How to Identify a Lost Person



“According to Operation World, about 85% of people in the United States of America claim to be Christians.”



*H*ave you ever heard of identity theft? The latest statistics from the Federal Trade Commission tell us that more than 9 million people in the USA will have their identity stolen in any given year. This means, somebody who you have never met opens up new accounts in your name and spends your hard-earned money as if they were really you. Identity theft costs \$53 billion dollars each year and 300 million hours in lost time annually reconciling stolen accounts for these 9 million people.¹⁷⁴

There is another kind of identity theft going on. According to *Operation World*, about 85% of people in the United States of America claim to be Christians.¹⁷⁵ The only thing one needs to do to solve identity theft is to take the genuine ID and compare it with the thief. Contrast the distinguishing characteristics of that identifying photo with the thief and all will be uncovered.

We do not want any one to have that scenerio play out on Judgment Day when the Righteous Judge will inform a shocked multitude of professing Christians: “*I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness*” (Matthew 7:23). These were people who had preached in Christ’s name and done “*many wonderful works*”. They masqueraded as Christians outwardly, but inwardly they were lawless and used Christ for their own selfish purposes. They did not have the inward identifying marks of a Christian.

¹⁷⁴ Jeordan Legon. *Federal Trade Commission: Identity theft strikes 1 in 8 adults*. CNN.com (online article). Posted Wednesday, October 29, 2003. Also see the Federal Trade Commission’s web site concerning Identity Theft at: <http://www.ftc.gov/bcp/edu/microsites/idtheft/consumers/about-identity-theft.html>.

¹⁷⁵ Patrick Johnstone. *Operation World 21st Century Revised Edition* (Gabriel Resources: Waynesboro, GA, 2000), 31.

Paul in Ephesians 4 describes the heart and life of a person without Christ. Descriptions are important. Police, when they are looking for a suspect give an all-points bulletin, give a description of the perpetrator. They try to discern how tall the person is, what color hair they have, what vehicle they might be driving. In the same way, Paul identifies five characteristics of lost people in order to mark them and distinguish them from true Christians.

The Bible teaches us exactly how we may tell the difference between a saved person and a lost person. Jesus said “*Thus you will recognize them by their fruits*” (Matthew 7:20). Paul said, “*Examine yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith*” (2 Corinthians 13:5). Christians are known by their fruit. The way Paul identifies a lost person in Ephesians 4 is by the fruit they lack.

Mark 1: Lost people lack a divine purpose.

The Christian cannot stop thinking about spiritual things. He says “*For me to live is Christ*”! A Christian has the mind of Christ (1 Corinthians 2:16). Every Christian has one purpose—to be conformed to the image of Jesus Christ (Romans 8:29).

Those without Christ on the other hand are vain in their thinking. Paul begins his description by saying that the entire human race by nature lives a life of no eternal meaning, and that Christians should never live that way: “*Now this I say and testify in the Lord, that you must no longer walk as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds*” (Ephesians 4:17). All unsaved people walk in a futile, empty, and vain state of thinking. A lost person’s thoughts are self-centered as opposed to God-centered, and therefore, ultimately meaningless in light of eternity. We are commanded to “*love the LORD your God*

with all [our]...mind” (Luke 10:27, NKJV), but the lost person by his nature cannot comprehend “*the things of the Spirit of God*” (1 Corinthians 2:14).

Bible Knowledge is Not the Same as Knowing Christ

A person can have a vain mind and know God’s Word very well. A person with who is alienated from the life of God can be an expert on Biblical literature. Anyone can understand it out of curiosity and have an historical or informational perspective. It can inspire any person saved or lost on the planet to be a better person. It can give any one instruction to live a better life—have a better family, run a better business, have better friendships and relationships, whether a person is a believer or not. This has been proven over and over again. But knowledge alone does not make anyone a Christian. Knowing successful principles of living also does not make one a Christian. Ultimately a lost person has a purpose for living that is outside of the Person of Jesus Christ. They cannot say “*For to me to live is Christ*” (Philippians 1:21). Paul’s conclusion was that everything outside of the deep knowledge of Christ was nothing but dung (Philippians 3:8). All was vain except intimately knowing Christ.

There are many things that keep people’s thoughts wrapped up in vanity, but I have not found three areas that more ensnare people than earthly riches, shallow religion, and worldly recreation.

Those with Vain Minds Set Their Heart on Earthly Riches

Instead of setting their mind on Christ, so many people find their purpose in storing up earthly prosperity. Many lost people are waiting for that next great thing to come out—they want it. Their purpose in life is to be on the edge of cultural relevance. They want the latest clothing style, the latest technology, the latest automobile engineering, or whatever new thing comes out. Now there is nothing wrong with decent cars, clothes, or possessions in and of themselves. In other words, to be rich is not a sin. What is sinful is idolatry: making possessions a god. Those who make getting the latest and the greatest of earthly possessions the purpose of living, do so at the peril of their soul. Jesus said, “*No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money [earthly prosperity]*” (Matthew 6:24).

It is easy to forget “*when he dies he will carry nothing away*” (Psalm 49:17). The one who sets his heart on riches, sets his heart on the wrong thing. Riches or poverty come from the Lord, and we are to glorify Him with however little or however much he gives us. “*The Lord makes poor and makes rich; he brings low and he exalts*” (1 Samuel 2:7).

Yet those without Christ are taken in by the deceitfulness of riches (Mark 4:19), as if possessions could actually satisfy. Material possessions promise all kinds of earthly satisfaction, but never deliver. No one can ever have enough because riches were never meant to satisfy the depths of the human heart. One story of John D. Rockefeller, the famous American banker, has it that he was once asked how much more money he would need to be happy and have enough. “One more dollar than I

have now,” he replied.¹⁷⁶ Because a lost person has a vain mind, he is easily enslaved to riches.

People invariably trust in riches though it does them no eternal good whatsoever. “*For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul?*” (Mark 8:36). What a meaningless existence. Esau sold his soul for a bowl of lentil soup (Hebrews 12:16). It was a grossly unfair exchange. In the same way, what is all the money in the world in comparison to a person’s never dying soul? Money can at times purchase comforts for the body, but it can never satisfy the longing of the soul. Lost people live in the vanity of their mind and cannot see beyond their next paycheck.

The Bible tells us that we should “*Do not toil to acquire wealth*” (Proverbs 23:4), but instead to “*seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you*” (Matthew 6:33). Many lost people set their hearts and minds on earthly prosperity which keeps them from trusting in Christ. Jesus said in Luke 18:24, “*How difficult it is for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!*” Baal worship was the ancient pagan worship of prosperity. Baal was the prosperity god. Baal worship is alive and well today. We are living in the most prosperous times in the history of the world. Even our poor people are rich compared to the rest of history. Sadly, many civilized people are still pagan at heart, trusting in riches. Earthly prosperity has taken the place of God in the hearts of many people.

What will give a person purpose is to have a supernatural prosperity. James 2:5 tells us as much, “*Listen, my beloved brothers, has not God chosen those who are poor in the world*

¹⁷⁶ Dennis Rainey. *Building Your Mate’s Self Esteem* (Thomas Nelson Publishers: Nashville, 1995), 33.

to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom, which he has promised to those who love him?" If you are a Christian, you know that being rich or poor does not make you more or less spiritual. What is most important is how you please God with whatever resources He gives you. You *"but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal"* (Matthew 6:20).

If you are a Christian, your purpose is not to earn money but to please God. Your purpose is glorify God and love and enjoy Him. Whether you prosper or not is up to God (1 Samuel 2:7). A Christian's purpose is not in riches but in the Redeemer (Philippians 1:21).

Those with Vain Minds Enjoy Superficial Religion

The vain mind of a lost person can be entirely taken up with the Bible and religion without any meaningful transformation. Hebrews 6 warns us that a person can be somewhat enlightened and *"tasted the heavenly gift"* and still not have come to salvation in Christ. A person may be outwardly attached to the true church, but not inwardly attached to Christ (John 15:6). The Bible teaches that there is no religion but Christ (John 14:6). Lost people have an *"appearance of godliness, but denying its power"* (2 Timothy 3:5). The only true religion is to be in Jesus Christ Himself. Harry A. Ironside said it well: "Christianity is Christ!"¹⁷⁷ True religion transforms the very heart and soul of a person: *"if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation"* (2 Corinthians 5:17). There is

¹⁷⁷ H. A. Ironside as quoted in *At His Feet: Daily Readings to Deepen Your Walk with Jesus* (Tyndale Publishing House: Wheaton, 2003), 152.

nothing supernatural in the lost. They can have an earthly form of religion that salves their conscience, but it is of no eternal help to them. Religion cannot take away sins or gain a person a right standing with God. A person may attach himself to Baptist fundamentalism or Presbyterianism, or any other movement within the Church. But God does not call us to come to a religious movement or to a religious leader. He calls us to come to Christ. It is through Christ alone that we become acceptable to God (Ephesians 1:6).

Many Catholics, cultists, false teachers, and even atheists all know the Bible very well, and some of them have lived healthy and even somewhat happy lives as far as earthly morality is concerned. There are some very honest Catholics and cultists and atheists who are all self deceived, but at the same time do not violate their conscience. They keep their word. They are sensitive not to lie. They are ethical. There are even professing atheists who can live according to the principles of the Bible simply as a book of instruction.

Remember that Paul was a Pharisee of Pharisees and concerning keeping the law, his conscience was blameless (Philippians 3:6). But none of what I have just described is anything close to Biblical Christianity. Paul, when he was Saul the Pharisee, was a candidate for the Lake of Fire.

A person can be a member of local church that is experiencing deep revival and go to the Lake of Fire from their church pew. Remember that Judas went to hell even though he had a perfect Pastor and Teacher. It is not the knowing of good doctrine that makes a person acceptable in God's sight. A person is abominable in God's sight until he is accepted by God in the righteousness of Christ through faith. The vain mind of

the lost person can easily wrap itself around Christianity without actually being converted.

Those with Vain Minds Enjoy Purposeless Recreation

Asherah was the goddess of pleasure in the ancient world.¹⁷⁸ Asherah worship is alive and well today. Many people find their purpose in recreation. They are glued to their TVs, to their PlayStations, to their iPhones and their computers. They love their movies and their vacations and their travel. Pleasure and ease are a drug that make people forget the pain of life.

The recreation of a lost person is designed to make him forget. He is amused. “A” means “no” or “without” and “muse” means “to think”. So amusement is something you can do without thinking. It is vain. The Christian’s recreation is like God’s recreation. On the seventh day the Lord rested. He did not stop thinking. He did not amuse Himself. He did not go to sleep. “*Behold, he who keeps Israel will neither slumber nor sleep*” (Psalm 121:4). He *reflected*. He thought deeply about His work, and it brought God Almighty pleasure (Genesis 1:31-2:3). Man’s highest recreation is to feed on Christ, to feed on the “*Bread of life*”, to “*taste and see that the Lord is good*” (Psalm 34:8; 1 Peter 2:3), to meditate on the beauty of His holiness. The blessed man’s “*delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night*” (Psalm 1:2).

The Christian’s thoughts have purpose. He has the mind of Christ. His riches, his religion, and his recreation are all divinely purposed in and through Christ. In other words, for a

¹⁷⁸ Charles John Ellicott. *An Old Testament Commentary for English Readers* (Cas-sell, Petter, Galpin & Co.: New York, 1883), 169.

Christian “*to live is Christ*” (Philippians 1:21). All else is idolatry.

Mark 2: Lost people lack divine perception.

Paul goes on to give us a second distinguishing mark of lost people. He says that these “*Gentiles*” not only “*walk, in the vanity of their mind*”, but they also have their understanding darkened (Ephesians 4:18). People without Christ cannot see the things that Christians see. There is a continual, ongoing condition of spiritual darkness. There is an absence of spiritual understanding. Paul says lost people cannot understand spiritual realities. “*The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned*” (1 Corinthians 2:14). A Christian on the other hand, lacks nothing to know the will of God. He simply needs to ask for wisdom, and God will give it to him freely (James 1:5).

The Danger of Spiritual Impairment

A lost person’s spiritual vision is impaired. He has his understanding darkened (Ephesians 4:18). We are all born “*in Adam*” (1 Corinthians 15:22). We are spiritually stillborn—“*dead in the trespasses and sins*” (Ephesians 2:1) and are “*by nature children of wrath*” (Ephesians 2:3) and “*sons of disobedience*” (Ephesians 2:2). David tells us in Psalm 58:3 that his enemies are innately sinful and nurtured from birth in deceit. Yet it is true that all men “*are estranged from the womb*” and “*go astray from birth, speaking lies.*” Our own hardened hearts have caused our spiritual darkness. This bent toward sin and stubbornness is evident in a child from birth.

Moses was clear in Genesis 8:21 that “*man’s heart is evil from his youth.*” According to the *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, the word “*youth*” (Heb. נַעֲוָר, na‘uwr) can be translated in reference to a wide age group, from a “babe”, to a “child”, to a “young man”.¹⁷⁹ The word was used of baby Moses (Exodus 2:6).

Jonathon Edwards, in his classic work *The Great Christian Doctrine of Original Sin Defended*, remarks on this verse:

The word translated youth, signifies the whole of the former part of the age of man, which commences from the beginning of life. The word in its derivation, has reference to the birth or beginning of existence...so that the word here translated youth, comprehends not only what we in English most commonly call the time of youth, but also childhood and infancy.¹⁸⁰

Since man is sinful from his very beginning, he are therefore “*condemned already*” (John 3:18) to physical and eventually spiritual death “*in Adam*” (1 Corinthians 15:22). Just as Christ is the Head of the church, so Adam is the federal head of sinful humanity. He is their representative, and his sin is imputed to the human race so that all human beings will die, and all in Adam are “*made sinners*” because of his disobedience (Romans 5:19). This puts all mankind from the womb in a very dangerous position as all are born with the innate tendency toward selfishness and sin. Since the Lake of Fire is the ultimate destination for all who die in sin, it is dangerous to be

¹⁷⁹ R. L. Harris, G. L. Archer, & B. K. Waltke. *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1980), H05271, נַעֲוָר, na‘uwr].

¹⁸⁰ Jonathan Edwards. *The Great Christian Doctrine of Original Sin Defended* (Boston: J. Johnson and Co., 1766), 232-233.

spiritually blind to this fact.¹⁸¹ Danger lurks at every turn. Life is snatched from people young and old. Most of the time death happens suddenly and people fall into the precipice of eternity. The majority of people on this earth are blind to what happens after death. They purposely do not plan for it. They are sightless, and they do not care to ponder death and God. Like a blind man falling off a precipice, the lost will fall into a deeper, everlasting pit of torment, yet they see it not.

Have you ever had your windshield covered with frost? Reality outside is darkened until the ice melts. The person who is lost does not have the fire of the Spirit of God to melt the ice on his spiritual eyes. A lost person cannot understand. He is darkened. This gives all lost people a dangerous security even though they are all perilously close to death at any time.

The lost person cannot see the absurdity of living for the present instead of living for paradise. He enjoys a movie full of cussing and blasphemy and falls asleep in church. It is fun for him to commit adultery, even though he knows it might end his marriage. He is vision impaired and thinks God will forgive him because he is not that bad. He is sincere and goes to church. He even feels bad about his sin. He prays. He cannot see how unacceptable he is to a holy God. The lost person is like a man who cannot smell his own bad breath. He is like the garbage truck driver. He has been around the garbage so long he no longer senses the strong stench.

Lost people are darkened spiritually, but they can learn truth intellectually. They are “*always learning and never able to arrive at a knowledge of the truth*” (2 Timothy 3:7). There is

¹⁸¹ The only exception of those born in Adam who are not automatically damned would be infants, very young children, and those who are mentally impaired from birth. For an explanation, see Appendix 1, “The Eternal Destiny of Infants, Young Children, and the Mentally Impaired”.

an inability to grasp spiritual realities. Spiritual realities are a bore. They are not penetrated and affected by truth, though they may have a good intellectual grasp of sound doctrine. They cannot actually be cut to the heart by God's truth until there is a change in nature. There must be a transplant of spiritual eyes to see.

The Joy of Spiritual Sight—John Newton

The former slave ship captain, John Newton (1725–1807) understood what it was to be released from spiritual blindness. He was a rough young man with no care for anyone or anything but himself. But on March 21st, 1748 returning home during a storm he experienced a "great deliverance."

Halfway through the Atlantic, out of boredom, he picked up the only available book on board the ship, *The Imitation of Christ* by Thomas á Kempis. As he read it he began to worry that its words might be true. So he slammed the book shut and went to sleep until awakened in the middle of a terrifying storm by the cry, "The ship is sinking!"

The ship was badly holed and waterlogged. As it seemed to be going down, Newton, to his own great astonishment, began to pray, "Lord, have mercy on us!" After many hours of extreme peril, the storm subsided, and Newton felt at peace. "About this time," he said, "I began to know that there is a God who answers prayer." Almost immediately Newton stopped swearing, changed his licentious lifestyle, and started to pray and read the Bible. From that day, March 21, 1748, until his death in 1807 he never let a year go by without recognizing in prayerful thanksgiving what he called his "great turning day" of conversion.¹⁸²

¹⁸² Jonathan Aitken. *John Newton: From Disgrace to Amazing Grace* (Wheaton, IL: Good News Publishers, 2007), 19.

Later he renounced his slave trading, became a minister, and joined William Wilberforce in the fight against slavery. What would make a wicked slave trader be turned into a preacher of the Gospel? In 1779, Newton, who was now a preacher, penned the famous hymn *Amazing Grace*:

*Amazing grace how sweet the sound
That saved a wretch like me!
I once was lost but now am found,
Was blind, but now I see!*

Like Newton's hymn intimates, God gives us "*eyes to see and ears to hear*" and a "*heart to understand*" (Deuteronomy 29:4). It is a shocking, transforming experience when God has "*the eyes of your hearts enlightened*" (Ephesians 1:18; contrast with the darkened understanding of 4:18).

A saved person's vision is awakened. A saved person trusts "*in the Lord with all [his] heart*" and "*lean[s] on [his] own understanding*" (Proverbs 3:5). A saved person sees everything through the eyes of Jesus. There is a spiritual perception. A Christian is "*looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God*" (Hebrews 11:10).

Christ has come to open the eyes of lost people. Christ commissioned Paul in Acts 26:18: "*to open their eyes, so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.*"

John Wesley's Great Awakening

The famous Great Awakening preacher, John Wesley, was quite biblically educated before he was converted but needed a spiritual awakening himself. He had been an ordained Anglican missionary to the American Indians of Georgia in the colonies, and his work there had failed miserably. Back in London, he had a conversation with a Moravian missionary, Peter Böhler that would plant the seeds for His eyes to be opened.

After much prayerful intercourse with Peter Böhler, Wesley was fully convinced that Christian faith was not the intellectual acceptance of orthodox opinions, but a vital act, and afterwards a habit of the soul by which man, under the supernatural impulse of the Spirit of God, trusts in Christ, enters into living union with Christ, and then abides in Christ, so that he no longer lives but Christ lives in him, as the vine lives in the branch, and as the controlling mind lives in the body. Then came the ever-memorable 24th of May, 1738, when Methodism as history knows it was born. That day in ecclesiastical annals is like the day on which Saul of Tarsus saw Christ.¹⁸³

Listen to Wesley's own account of his conversion:

In the evening I went very unwillingly to a society in Aldersgate-street, where one was reading Luther's preface to the Epistle to the Romans. About a quarter before nine, while he was describing the change which God works in the heart through faith in Christ, I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone, for salvation; and an assurance was given me that He had taken away my sins, even mine, and

¹⁸³ James Knowles. *The Nineteenth Century: A Monthly Review, Vol XXIX*. (New York: Kegan Paul, Trench, Tubner, and Co. Ltd., 1891), 485.

saved me from the law of sin and death.... I then testified openly to all there what I now first felt in my heart.¹⁸⁴

As we can see from John Wesley, John Newton, and the general testimony of all of God's people, until Christ does a supernatural work of opening the eyes, the understanding will remain darkened. Our Lord said it would be so: "*No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him*" (John 6:44). Without this spiritual illumination from God, the unconverted person will never come to Christ. "*No man seeketh after God*" (Romans 3:11) because "*the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious Gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them*" (2 Corinthians 4:4). Lost people lack the spiritual awakening that brings them divine perception. Their minds remain blinded. As Wesley, they might even be teaching and preaching the Gospel as a missionary, but until the Christ's Spirit works in their heart, they remain spiritually blind and lost.

Mark 3: Lost people lack the divine presence.

Lost people are "*alienated from the life of God*" (Ephesians 4:18). Without the divine presence a person cannot rightly understand God's instructions in the Bible (2 Corinthians 2:14) and therefore lacks even the mere understanding of what it means to please God. Yet it is not simply understanding the Gospel intellectually which saves a person. The thing that makes a person a Christian is not just his creed but his Creator living inside of him. "*Or do you not know that your body is a*

¹⁸⁴ John Wesley. *The Heart of John Wesley's Journal* (New York: Fleming H. Revell Co, 1903), 43.

temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own" (1 Corinthians 6:19).

A Christian on the other hand is one of God's masterpieces (Ephesians 2:10) and has the Author of his new heart residing in him (Ezekiel 36:27). The divine presence is recognizable in the Christian. If someone were to tell me that my five year old son Will painted the Mona Lisa, that person would be saying something absurd. The Mona Lisa is not the work of an amateur, but has the distinguishing characteristics of one of the great masters, Leonardo da Vinci. Picasso's work is also distinguishable. You can tell a Rembrandt from a Van Gogh. And you can tell a Christian, the workmanship of God, a new creation, from a person which is dead in trespasses and sins and alienated from the life of God. God gives the Christian a new nature and then actually inhabits that person. "*But he who is joined to the Lord becomes one spirit with him*" (1 Corinthians 6:17).

A lost person is at times like a fake computer display. It looks like the computer is lit up, but it's just a decoy, a sticker. There is no divine life in him. Christians on the other hand are "*partakers of the divine nature*" (2 Peter 1:4).

No Divine Learning

There is no divine learning. Our Lord said it plainly: "*My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me*" (John 10:27). Paul said a saved person has "*learned Christ*", "*heard*" His voice and "*were taught in him, as the truth is in Jesus*" (Ephesians 4:20-21). Jesus claimed in John 6:45, "*they will all be taught by God. Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to me...*" A lost person does not hear the voice of God because he is not indwelt by the presence

of God. There is an alienation from the life of God. The unconverted have not been quickened by the Holy Spirit. Lost people cannot experience anything more than superficial changes because they have nothing but human power. All they have to rely on is the counsel of their own deceptive heart (Jeremiah 17:9; cf. Psalm 1:1).

No Divine Life

Since there is no divine learning, there is no divine living. The best description in the entire Bible of the lost person's powerless condition is found in Ephesians 2:1-3. Paul says to the Ephesian believers: you were all at one time "*dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience—among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.*" What brings us out of this mess? It is Jesus Christ personally teaching us and drawing us to the Father. A lost person may live the way Paul described above, not a Christian. Paul says in Ephesians 4:20, "*ye have not so learned Christ*".

A lost person has no ability to do the will of God. All he can do is imitate the Christian at best with his flesh. But Paul says in Romans 7:18, "*For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh.*" Jesus said as much in John 6:63, "*the flesh is no help at all.*" With human power a person cannot much more than be moral and live an organized life.

It is true that lost people can have a form of godliness that looks like the real thing. They can be moved and affected by the Word of God in a superficial way. I have seen many lost people

weep during the preaching and teaching of the Word of God. Mere emotion is a natural event in the heart and life of every person, saved or lost. To be moved by a story is a far cry from repentance and faith.

Propping up the Dead

In Ponchatoula, Louisiana, where I lived as a child, they bury dead people above the ground in a concrete coffin vault. Because of the water level, the coffins used to creep up out of the ground. The dead were moving in a sense—there was activity. They were being pushed up simply by their environment, but they were not alive. There may have been movement, but it was a far cry from a resurrection. They were thankfully still quite dead! And it is the same with the spiritually dead. There can be twinges of conscience. A lost person can be deeply moved by the Gospel. He can find the fact of Jesus dying on the cross to be emotionally powerful and even make an emotional commitment to Christ. But that is not what saves a person. What is it that saves a person? It is the “*life of God*” invading their soul! It is a spiritual marriage union with a thrice Holy God through faith. It is a spiritual resurrection.

What a joy that with the new birth, the Spirit of God indwells a believer’s soul. The divine presence is the earnest of our heavenly inheritance. We can say with Paul: “*Christ...lives in me*” (Galatians 2:20). Christians are indwelt with the same power that raised Jesus Christ from the dead. Sadly, lost people have no concept of God’s indwelling presence.

Mark 4: Lost people lack divine passion.

Lost people have hearts of stone. They are as Ephesians 4:18 says, “*alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart.*” The word “*blindness*” is a word that literally means “hardness” or “the covering with a callus”, and is figuratively translated “*blindness*”.¹⁸⁵ The Greek word is “*poros*” which was originally used to describe “a stone harder than marble”.¹⁸⁶ The lost person goes after the passions of this world, because he does not know ultimate satisfaction comes from being in spiritual union with the perfectly holy Creator. C.S. Lewis describes the misguided passions of the lost person in his address entitled *The Weight of Glory*:

We are half hearted creatures, fooling around with drink and sex and ambition, when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea, we are far too easily pleased.¹⁸⁷

In our former lost state, we were “far too easily pleased” with shallow sinful pleasures and passions, because our hearts were hardened to the “infinite joy” only found in Christ.

There is a veil of ignorance over the lost person’s heart. This keeps him from having that all consuming passion for Christ. A person blind from birth does not know the beauty around him; he is ignorant of the colors and the shapes and the

¹⁸⁵ Robert L. Thomas. *New American Standard Hebrew-Aramaic and Greek Dictionaries: Updated Edition*. (Foundation Publications, Inc.: Anaheim, 1998, 1981), 8674.

¹⁸⁶ R. Kent Hughes. *Ephesians: The Mystery of the Body of Christ* (Good News Publishers: Wheaton, 1990), 140.

¹⁸⁷ C.S. Lewis. *The Weight of Glory and Other Addresses* (rev. and exp. edl, Macmillan, 1980), 3-4.

textures around him. So a lost person is also ignorant of the beauty of God. His heart is ignorant. He has no real comprehension of the greatness of God or the greatness of his own sin. He is as verse 18 says, “*alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them...*” It is not that people have a problem with their intellect. People have more education today than ever in the history of the world. They can comprehend things intellectually, but there is a spiritual blindness to them.

They can superficially know all the right things. They can obey and listen to their conscience. But having a strong conscience is not the same as being converted.

A lost person has a heart that is sightless and hardened. *Paul* says those without Christ have a veil over their understanding, like Moses had over his face to hide the glory of God (2 Corinthians 3:7). *Ezekiel* says the heart is hard—as cold and hard as stone! God must do a radical spiritual surgery and break the heart of stone and replace it with a heart of flesh (Ezekiel 36:26-27).

Mark 5: The lost person has no divine power.

The lost are controlled by another power: the power of their deceitful heart and the desires of their fleshly nature. They “*being past feeling have given themselves over unto lasciviousness, to work all uncleanness with greediness*” (Ephesians 4:19, KJV). The unconverted are enslaved by the license of their flesh. Instead of obeying God, their desire is to please themselves which leads them even to immorality with a greedy desire for more and more. The Christian on the other hand is endowed with power from on high to restrain the flesh and to do the will of God.

A lost person has no power to do anything that pleases God. He can only go on doing what he knows to do. He knows how to sin. He is helpless because of this. As Ephesians 2:3 says, it was among these people “*among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.*”

The lost person has no way to help himself. Emotion will not bring a person to Christ. The Holy Spirit alone raises spiritually dead to life by the power of His Word which gives life. The Holy Spirit has no helper. Man does not assist God in any way, any more than Lazarus assisted Christ at his grave. Caterpillars cannot fly. Butterflies fly. Man’s only hope is a spiritual endowment with power. Why?

By nature the lost person is a slave to his callousness. He has no spiritual sensitivity. Lost people are “past feeling” (verse 19). They are calloused. Some cannot even blush. They may be upright and moral, but their dislike for sin goes only to a certain level.

By nature he is a slave to his selfishness. The lost person is “*past feeling have given themselves over unto lasciviousness*” (Ephesians 4:19, KJV). The Greek word for “*lasciviousness*” was once excellently defined by Basil the Great as “a disposition of the soul incapable of bearing the pain of discipline”.¹⁸⁸ It means an internal license to do anything that pleases me. Anything goes as long as I am happy. In other words, man becomes a god to Himself. Satisfying his pleasures, whether it means the comfort of not being bothered, or satisfying the flesh or gratifying the ego. It is utterly self-centered.

¹⁸⁸ William Barclay. *The Letters to the Galatians and Ephesians: The New Daily Study Bible* (Westminster John Knox Press: Louisville, 2002), 176.

By nature he is a slave to his fleshliness. A person who feeds his flesh ultimately becomes an addict of some kind. There are all kinds of addictions. They “*work all uncleanness with greediness*”. A lost person may be greedy for seemingly good things, but they are unclean because they take the place of God. Truly, even “*lamp of the wicked, are sin*” (Proverbs 21:4).

There is no natural deliverance from the lost condition. There is only one answer: a supernatural work of God. You must be “*taught of him as the truth is in Jesus*”. You must “*learn of Christ*”. The authentic work of God is identifiable in the life of a Christian. There are many that claim to be true Christians, but if they lack God’s distinguishing characteristics in their lives, then they are nothing more than frauds.

The Need for Authentication from the Life of Stradivari

We understand the need to have authentication even in earthly things. Think about the famous Stradivarius violins. Today, literally hundreds of thousands of Stradivarius violins are being sold even though only 512 are known to be in existence today! Each one of the originals is worth from one to three million dollars. Knowing this, I decided to do a search on the online auction site Ebay recently and not surprisingly I found 82 for sale with the highest price being an amazing \$24,000. There’s a great need for authentication!

Antonio Stradivari was born in 1644 and set up his shop in Cremona, Italy, where he made violins and other stringed instruments until his death in 1737. As a master craftsman, his violins have served as *the* standard for all violin makers since. Nothing compares with his amazing violins—every Stradivarius was made entirely by hand, with specialized woods and

varnishes and secrets of craftsmanship that died with Stradivarius.¹⁸⁹ Only 512 of these violins exist today. Literally millions of fakes have been bought and sold since the time of Stradivarius.

The authentication of a Stradivarius violin can be determined only by a careful examination of each violin looking at the design, the model, Stradivarius's personal craftsmanship, and the specialized woods and varnishes used. It is not hard to separate out the mass-produced violins from the actual hand-made instruments, but most people are not willing to investigate. There are therefore thousands of people are defrauded each year!

Let not one of us be defrauded by the claim of so many who call themselves Christians. We must be careful to look for the identifying marks.

¹⁸⁹ See the article, "The Violin as an Historical Sketch" from W.S.B. Mathews, ed. *Music: A Monthly Magazine, Devoted to the Art, Science, Technic and Literature of Music, Vol. VIII* (Chicago: The Music Magazine Publishing Co., 1895), 591-593.



The Unrighteous Will Not In- herit the Kingdom



*“Sin abounds in the midst of unprecedented re-
ligiosity. If there are so many of us, why are we
not affecting our world?”*

CHARLES COLSON



Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience.

EPHESIANS 5:6

*S*aul tells us to be very careful of those who profess with “*empty words*” to know Christ but do not have a new heart that longs after and loves God, but instead have a heart that cherishes sin. These people say they are in Christ, but Christ does not seem to be in them. Some in our churches today outwardly say they treasure Christ, but their heart remains unchanged. They are intoxicated with the self-life and all the deceitful pleasures of sin. These same kinds of people lived in Paul’s day, and Paul actually addresses this very issue in the fifth chapter of Ephesians.

Do Not Be Deceived By Empty Words

A Christianity that is not transforming the life of a person is no Christianity at all. In spite of the fact that I disagree on many issues with my brother in Christ, I believe Chuck Colson got it right when he sounded the alarm on this kind of nominal Christianity:

No doubt about it, religion is up. But so are values unremittingly opposed to the truth of Christianity: One out of every two marriages shatters in divorce; one out of three pregnancies terminates in abortion. Homosexuality is no longer considered depravity, but an 'alternative lifestyle.' Crime continues to soar--in 'Christian' America there are 100 times more burglaries than in 'pagan' Japan.

That is the great paradox today: Sin abounds in the midst of unprecedented religiosity. If there are so many of us, why are we not affecting our world?¹⁹⁰

The obvious answer is that “Christian” America is not Christian at all. Colson’s description is that of lost people. There are many all around us who claim to be true Christians and yet they practice a life of ongoing sin as if it is no big deal. Can we really allow those who practice a life of sin to claim the title “Christian”?

An Inward Compulsion to Be Like Christ

It is not possible for Christians to continue their entire lives in sin. Paul is clear that the Christian has had a fundamental change of nature. “[F]or at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light” (Ephesians 5:8). Paul is speaking in this verse of the miracle of regeneration which produces an inward compulsion to be like Christ. In this miracle God gives to us the new nature and seals us with His Spirit so that all Christians have an internal desire to be conformed to the image of His Son.

What a radical change! Our old life was so sinful, that Paul uses a metaphor and calls it darkness. Our new life is so holy that Paul similarly calls it light! The point he is making is that if we have a nature of light and holiness, our lives are going to shine with the light of holiness.

¹⁹⁰ Charles Colson, "Playing it Safe is Just Playing," Christianity Today (October 17, 1986).

An Outward Conformity to Christlikeness

God gives us His presence and a new nature in order to begin a process of holiness in us that brings us into the conformity of His Son. Theologians often call this process progressive sanctification. When God justifies a sinner He begins the sanctification process to make him holy. God sent His Son into the world not simply to forgive the guilty sinner, but to transform him into a holy person. Justification is only part of it. A Christian is not simply forgiven of past sins but called to forsake his present sins and follow Christ being conformed to His image (Romans 8:29). This is the purpose of God in drawing a sinner to Himself—to conform him and mold him into the image of Christ. The Christian will fail along the way. He will be very aware of his daily lack of perfection, but he will cling to Christ along the way. And day by day he will be more and more conformed to the image of Christ. This purpose of God cannot be defeated in any one of His chosen people whom He foreknew.

The foundational doctrine that all Christians should already know is that those who persist in sin are not God’s children. God’s children are of a completely different nature. We have an inward compulsion to holiness and an outward conformity to that holiness in the image of Christ. We are “*children of light*”.

Christianity is Not a Matter of Empty Words

The one who has only empty words is nothing more than a deceiver who speaks of Christ for show. A religious deceiver is good at what he does. He makes you think he loves God on the outside, but in his heart he cherishes sin. He may conform

outwardly for many reasons—to please people, to make his life easier—but he does not serve Christ from the heart but legalistically. He does just what is required of him. He may do more if it suits him. But he is still sitting in the control seat of his life. As D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones said, Christianity “is not a matter of [empty] words. Any man can say, ‘Lord! Lord!’ but if he still goes on with his sin there is no value in it, he is not a justified man. A man who is justified is a man to whom the process [or progressive sanctification] has been applied.”¹⁹¹

Christians are Keepers of the Law, but Not Justified by the Law

Paul says many times over that a Christian is not justified by the works of the law. He is clear that good works do not make us righteous in God’s sight because we are already guilty sinners. *‘For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight’* (Romans 3:20). Yet in another place Paul seems to contradict himself when he says, *“but the doers of the law who will be justified”* (Romans 2:13). What does Paul mean? Thomas Shreiner gives a helpful explanation.

Those who have the Spirit are enabled to keep God’s law and are transformed from within. Similarly, in Romans 2:29 Paul teaches that the circumcision of the heart, which was commanded and promised in the Old Testament (Deut 10:16; 20:6; Jer 4:4) is only accomplished by the Holy Spirit (cf. Jub 1:23). A true Jew does not necessarily have the marks of circumcision; the real Jew is empowered by the Holy Spirit. The reference to the Holy Spirit suggests that Paul does not

¹⁹¹ Ibid., 351.

argue hypothetically in Romans 2:26-27.¹⁹² The keeping of the law by the Gentiles is a real obedience, but it is one that stems from and is inspired by the Holy Spirit. Paul is, therefore, not contrasting the innate abilities of Jews and Gentiles. Both Jews and Gentiles, when their intrinsic capacities are contemplated, transgress God's law and are under the power of sin (Rom 3:9-20). Those who have the Holy Spirit, however, are strengthened to keep God's commands, and thus the new-covenant promises of Jeremiah (Jer 31:31-34) and Ezekiel (Ezek 11:19-20; 36:26-27) are being fulfilled in their lives.

Therefore Paul means what he says in asserting that "the doers of the law will be justified" (Rom 2:13). Such keeping of the law for justification, however, is to be distinguished from righteousness by works of the law (Rom 3:20).

...[W]hen Paul says the doers of the law will be justified, he...contemplates the result of the Spirit's work, not the attempt of human beings to be right in God's eyes by virtue of their own works.

...Paul does not dismiss the idea that our lives must be changed in order to be vindicated on the last day. Such changes, though, are due to the transforming work of Holy Spirit. No boasting is ascribed to human beings for their autonomous effort (Rom 3:27-28). The good works are produced by the power of the Spirit.¹⁹³

A New Direction, Not Perfection

¹⁹² Romans 2:26-27, "So if the uncircumcised man keeps the requirements of the Law, will not his uncircumcision be regarded as circumcision? And he who is physically uncircumcised, if he keeps the Law, will he not judge you who though having the letter of the Law and circumcision are a transgressor of the Law?" (NASB)

¹⁹³ Thomas R. Schreiner. *Paul, Apostle of God's Glory in Christ* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 2006), 281-282.

There is a new direction in the Christian's life that prohibits him from a life of sin. This in no way means the Christian is even close to perfection, but he lives a life that strives for perfection.

Like a man that walks across the road of an ocean dam, when the tide comes in he might get splashed with the water, but he lives and walks above the ocean, not in the water. In the same way, a believer lives and walks above the ocean of sin in this world. He may get splashed or even fall in from time to time, but he is not there long. That is not where he is comfortable living. Thomas Shreiner explains how the Scriptures assure that a Christian will have a changed life, but yet it is a very imperfect life.

Perfection will be ours in the eschaton, but in the "not yet" period it eludes believers. When we examine the texts that demand good works for salvation, they must not be interpreted in a perfectionistic framework. Paul envisions a new direction, a new obedience, a new affection in the lives of believers. He does not expect or demand perfection. He knows that sin afflicts us while we are in our mortal bodies (Rom 8:10, 23). He envisions the Christian life as a fierce struggle between competing desires while we are on earth (Gal 5:16-18). And yet the very reality of faith and the genuineness of the Spirit's work must be expressed in concrete ways.¹⁹⁴

"For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God" (Romans 8:14). Those who are not led by the Spirit ought not to be called the sons of God. If you as a store owner open up the milk containers and you find sewage water, it is not right to label those containers: "MILK". We ought not call those with

¹⁹⁴ Ibid., 182.

darkened lives dominated by sin children of light, but children of darkness. To do so is to speak empty words.

The Unrighteous Do Not Belong to God

Paul gave several lists of lifestyles of people who will not inherit heaven. These are people who show by their lives that they are not born again. They have experienced no nature change. Over and over Paul does not call these people saints or believers but “children of wrath”, the “ungodly”, “children of disobedience”. He warns that those who persist in sin do not belong to God.

Holiness is Foundational (Ephesians 5)

In Ephesians Paul says that we should already know that those who practice a life characterized by sin cannot enter into God’s kingdom. “Christian” means a follower or disciple of Christ, an imitator of Him in whom was no sin at all. This is something Christians already know. It is a foundational, elementary doctrine.

For you may be sure of this, that everyone who is sexually immoral or impure, or who is covetous (that is, an idolater), has no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God. Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. Therefore do not become partners with them; for at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light (Ephesians 5:5-8).

It is very elementary that followers of Christ are those committed to living a Christlike life. Those committed to ungodliness are not Christians. They may be church goers or leaders in the church or seminary professors—it does not matter—

those committed to ungodliness will not inherit the kingdom of Christ and of God. Paul says: “*This ye know*”. It is something basic, something beyond any doubt, beyond any argument. It is a settled matter. It is obvious and self-evident. If you are a Christian, you know this innately.¹⁹⁵

Such Were Some of You (1 Corinthians 6)

What Paul said to the Ephesians, he repeats to the Corinthians. Again he says that it is obvious and self-evident that those who live ungodly, lawless lives have no part in Christ’s kingdom.

Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God (1 Corinthians 6:9-11).

It is not that Christians who behave that way will not inherit the kingdom, it is that they *no longer* live in this manner because they are now governed by Christ. Those who live lawlessly and insist on claiming to be Christians are deceived people. True Christians are those who no longer live the lawless lifestyle of the world. Paul says “*such were some of you, but...*” you are different now. This transformation is possible through God’s work of indwelling us with His Spirit, justifying us, and making us “sanctified” and “washed” by the blood of Jesus.

¹⁹⁵ See David Martyn Lloyd-Jones. *Christian Unity—Studies in Ephesians, Chapter 4, Verses 1 Through 16* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1972), 342.

They Which Do Such Things... (Galatians 5)

What Paul has said to the churches at Ephesus and Corinth, he repeats to the Galatians. Those who persist in sinful living do not inherit God's kingdom because (by implication) if they can persist in sin, their nature has not been changed. They have not been born again. Those who are born again do not have lives that are characterized by the works of sin.

Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God (Galatians 5:19-21).

Galatians is the book where Paul establishes that we are free from the Law for justification. And yet he maintains that those who practice the works of the flesh shall not inherit God's kingdom. Those who practice unrighteousness (i.e. the unrighteous) are not true believers.

Martyn Lloyd-Jones asks, "What exactly does this statement in the fifth verse mean? The Apostle makes it clear. He is asserting that anyone whose habitual conduct is defiled by such sins as he names has no inheritance in the Kingdom of God."¹⁹⁶

He is not saying that those who stumble into these sins will not inherit the Kingdom of God. But what he is saying is that if these sins characterize your life—if you can live in them day after day, then you do not have the new birth. You as a Christian

¹⁹⁶David Martyn Lloyd-Jones. *Darkness and Light—Studies in Ephesians 4:17-5:17* (Grand Rapids : Baker Book House, 1972), 346.

cannot sin in the way you used to. You have been made a partaker of the divine nature. “*So, every healthy tree bears good fruit*” (Matthew 7:17). The new nature in you as well as God’s Holy Spirit will not permit a continual pattern of sin in your life. As Lloyd-Jones: “those whose life, is characterized by things contrary to God’s law, are not in the Kingdom of God; they have no inheritance there at all”.¹⁹⁷

The End of Those Things is Death (Romans 6)

Before we were saved we did nothing but sin. It was a fruitless empty life. We had no other desire than to give ourselves to a life with self on the throne. Now that God has changed us, we must choose to give our heart and life to Christ each day. The genuine Christian does not continue in them, but as Paul says is “*now ashamed*” of them. He knows that kind of life leads to eternal damnation.

Do you not know that if you present yourselves to anyone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness? But thanks be to God, that you who were once slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed...For just as you once presented your members as slaves to impurity and to lawlessness leading to more lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves to righteousness leading to sanctification. For when you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness. But what fruit were you getting at that time from the things of which you are now ashamed? For the end of those things is death (Romans 6:16-17, 19b-21).

¹⁹⁷Ibid., 347

The Mortification of Sin (Colossians 3)

What glorious freedom the child of God has! He now has the ability to put to death sinful habits. Not only do we have this new ability via the new nature, we are commanded to mortify sin—to ignore the temptation though it provokes us—to “reckon” it as dead.

Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. On account of these the wrath of God is coming (Colossians 3:5-6).

The unbeliever wants to continue in sin. The Christian wants to resist temptation. He is willing to get rid of any temptation traps in his life. Paul tells him how to do it. He says to “mortify” or put to death things that tempt you to sin. Jesus similarly used the illustration of radical amputation. “*And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away*” (Matthew 5:30). Christ was not encouraging bodily mutilation to deter ourselves from sin. He was using a metaphor to demonstrate the need for the radical amputation of sin from our lives. It is impossible to live a holy life if we constantly allow ourselves to live in the realm of temptation. Let me illustrate how not to do it with a little story.

A little boy’s mother had just baked a fresh batch of cookies and placed them in the cookie jar, giving instructions that no one touch them until after dinner. But it was not long until she heard the lid of the jar move, and she called out, ‘Son, what are you doing?’ To which a meek voice called back ‘My hand is in

the cookie jar resisting temptation!’ The fact of the matter is, *no one* can resist temptation with his hand in the cookie jar.

A true child of God does not continue in sin but lives a life of radical amputation.

The Kingdom of Christ and God

What is the “*the kingdom of Christ and of God*”? First of all it is something that belongs to and proceeds from Christ and God. It is their rule, their realm, their reign and authority. The realm of a king reflects His will being done in His kingdom. When you perceive the kingdom of God (as one who has been given a new nature, pure in heart), you realize God’s rule over your life. It is God exerting His power over your life. It is you realizing God’s rightful ownership of you as Creator and Redeemer.

You see, it is God who makes us part of His Kingdom. “*No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him*” (John 6:44). We are His property.

Peter reminds us: “*But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light*” (1 Peter 2:9). God is in the driver’s seat. He’s the One who put His holy nature in us. He’s the One who gives us the gifts of faith and of His very presence within us. God sent His Son to make us Holy. Paul says in Titus 2:14 that it is Jesus Christ, “*who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are **zealous for good works.***”

Paul demands that we as children of light walk holy, but as God’s children, it is our greatest desire to live a holy life. True believers want to live holy not because of outward compulsion,

but because of inward delight. Inwardly we are “*children of light*”. We have gladly surrendered our heart to a new master. Like the blessed man, our “*delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law [we] meditates day and night*” (Psalm 1:2). The true believer is inwardly addicted to holiness from his heart because he has God’s divine and holy nature (2 Peter 1:4). The God-given nature in us produces the same strong inclinations toward holiness that God’s nature has. There’s a passion and a pulse and a fire for holiness burning in the genuine believer’s heart. This is a delightful demand!

How Careful We Must Be

We must be careful not to give comfort to those who persist in a lifestyle of sin. Paul’s example was to warn those living in sin that those who choose to persist in these types of habitual sins will not inherit Christ’s Kingdom. The very reason lost people persist in sin is because they live under the dominion of the only nature they have, the sinful nature. They lack the new nature through Christ’s Spirit. The goal is not to break a bruised reed—a genuine Christian who is obviously under the conviction of God’s Spirit. We do however want to warn people in the manner the apostles instructed us. We must be very careful to do so.

15

Why Some Professing Christians Never Grow



“In John 15, the Lord describes a type of person in the church that seems to be attached to Jesus, but bears no fruit and is cut off from Christ eternally.”



Why is it that some professing Christians do not grow in grace?¹⁹⁸ Spiritual growth is clearly the will of God. Every Christian is predestined to holiness (Ephesians 2:10), to be “*conformed to the image of his Son*” (Romans 8:29). Peter tells us to “*grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ*” (2 Peter 3:18).

The Word of God is faithfully preached. There is a humble, receptive atmosphere. The Holy Spirit is obviously working in the lives of people. Some of the saints are making definite progress. Why is it that some professing Christians make no progress at all? Others seem to make progress, but it is only superficial. Others turn away all together. Why is it that some people do not grow in grace?

If there is no growth, I believe it is because the professing Christian is nothing more than a pretender. Someone once said that there are only three types of people: believers, non-believers, and make believers. How true. Many who profess Christianity have no life change because they are not partakers of the divine nature (1 Peter 1:4). God warns us about them throughout His Word. There are lots of people who can talk the talk, but they do not walk the walk.

It is not ever the business of any preacher to make any believer doubt the validity of his salvation. Neither is it the business of any preacher to tell anyone that he is on the road to heaven if the Holy Spirit says that he is on the road to hell. But we are all called to examine our own heart to see if we are producing the fruit of the new birth.

Everything that a person needs to bear fruit for Christ is available to him as a child of God. If he is not bearing fruit, it is

¹⁹⁸ Some of the ideas for this chapter came from a message (by the same title) given by my mentor and former pastor, Milton E. Jones.

his responsibility to find out why. All professing believers should be diligent about this matter. Each one who names Christ's name needs to make sure that he is in the faith. *“Examine yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Or do you not realize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?—unless indeed you fail to meet the test!”* (2 Corinthians 13:5).

In other places, God puts stern warnings that are meant to awaken people and cause them to flee to God. Consider the warning of Psalm 50:22: *“Mark this, then, you who forget God, lest I tear you apart, and there be none to deliver!”* Hebrews 3:12-13 is equally sobering: *“Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called “today,” that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.”*

The Word of God tells us of false prophets (Matthew 7:15), false Christs (Mark 13:22), false apostles (2 Corinthians 11:13), false brethren (Galatians 2:4), and false teachers (2 Peter 2:1). Our Lord warned us that both believers and unbelievers will abide side by side in the professing church until the Lord's coming. We see this in many places throughout the New Testament.

Cast Forth as a Branch and Burned

Believers and unbelievers are side by side in John 15, where the branches are connected to the Vine (Jesus Christ). Of these branches there are those that bear fruit, and those that are barren. In John 15:5-6 we have a description of these two types of people attached seemingly attached to Christ, but one is ultimately cut off. Listen to Jesus' words:

I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing. If anyone does not abide in me he is thrown away like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned.

What do these verses teach us? There is a type of person in the church that seems to be attached to Jesus, but bears no fruit and is cut off from Christ eternally. The unbeliever may say he is attached to Christ. He may attend the services of the church. He may call the saints of God his friends. Yet, if he does not bear the fruit of the Vine, then he reveals that he is not of the Vine. On the Day of Judgment he is cast forth as a barren pretender. In light of this, we ought to have a heightened suspicion of false converts in the church. You can at times know who these people are as you observe their lives. They simply never grow.

Vomited Out of the Mouth of the Lord

Christ speaks of other pretenders who never grow in His letters to the churches of Asia Minor. There are some in Laodicea who appear outwardly to be part of the Body of Christ, but the Lord is so repulsed by them, that He expels them from His Body like vomit from His mouth. They are like those who have *“the appearance of godliness, but denying its power”* (2 Timothy 3:5). Jesus says to those fruitless professors of Christianity in the Laodicean church: *“Would that you were either cold or hot! So, because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth”* (Revelation 3:15-16).

What was wrong? Christ discloses that true believers can not remain in a lukewarm state. Of course, these lukewarm among Laodicean church were self-deceived, thinking that they were quite spiritually hot. Their view of themselves was all wrong. They thought themselves to be rich, increased with goods, and having need of nothing. They were self-deceived. Jesus says their true state is “*wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked*” (Revelation 3:17). They are without the gold of spiritual inheritance or the white robe of Christ’s righteousness. They have no spiritual perception. This is the reason the false convert never grows. He is not a Christian at all. The false professor will be expelled from the Body when Christ comes to separate believers and unbelievers from His church.

Barren Trees Hewn Down, Cast into the Fire

“*Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees. Every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire*” (Luke 3:9). John the Baptist distinguished between true and false converts by their fruit. There are those trees which are planted in the midst of the Lord’s congregations who do not bring forth good fruit. They do not grow because they have no life in them. So useless and worthless are these barren trees that John the Baptizer deems them worthy of nothing but hell fire. Fruitless trees rob the soil from the fruit bearing trees. Christ will cut the barren trees down at their death or His Second Coming and cast them into the fire of eternal damnation.

The Forgetful Hearers vs. the Doers

James warns us again that there are the same two types of people in the church, and he has similar names for them: doers of the Word and those who are mere hearers only. James is obviously distinguishing between those that grow in the practical application of the Word, and those that have no meaningful fruit but only empty words. Indeed, the one who simply hears the Word but does nothing with it is said to be under a deception: “*But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves*” (James 1:22). Again, believers and unbelievers are side by side in this passage. How do we know that the forgetful hearer is lost? First he says they are self-deceived. Second, James clarifies in chapter 2:17-20 that these hearers do not have authentic saving faith, explaining that “*faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead*”.¹⁹⁹

Jesus intimated something very similar when He asked in Luke 6:46, “*Why do you call me ‘Lord, Lord,’ and not do what I tell you?*” The forgetful hearer cannot grow because he has a dead faith. He has no part of Christ and will not do the things that Christ says. He listens to them, sometimes intently. Sometimes he responds deeply, even with tears. But very quickly he forgets Christ’s words. He goes his own way. He is a pretender and not a true Christian. The heart of the matter is the heart. Only a new heart will bring forth true and *lasting* fruit.

The Sheep and the Goats

There are both sheep and goats in the churches. At any moment Christ will come again with all His holy angels, and He will divide the sheep from the goats (Matthew 25:31-32). Many

¹⁹⁹ cf. Romans 2:13

goats look like sheep to us, but in many people, God sees a goat's heart inwardly though they may appear with sheep's clothing on the outside. The sheep and the goats abide together until the Judgment. Of the goats, the Lord says, "*these will go away into eternal punishment*" (Matthew 25:46).

The Wheat and the Tares

In Matthew 13:24-26, 30 we find again two types of people in the church, the fruitful wheat and the barren tares.

He put another parable before them, saying, "The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a man who sowed good seed in his field, but while his men were sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat and went away. So when the plants came up and bore grain, then the weeds appeared also

Let both grow together until the harvest, and at harvest time I will tell the reapers, Gather the weeds first and bind them in bundles to be burned, but gather the wheat into my barn.

It is in this parable that we find out how false converts get into the church. The devil puts them there. Satan is always busy seeing who he can bring into this church without actually converting their soul.

We all know that weeds mimic flowers. In my flower garden, weeds come up that resemble flowers, but when you get up close, you see that the weeds are counterfeits, sucking the nutrients out of the soil and consuming the moisture from the earth. The weed may look good, but within it can never be anything more than a weed. It may resemble a flower but it is only a deception. So it is that pretenders can never be true

Christians. They can resemble true believers, but lost people will never be anything but lost until God works within the heart. Until that occurs, we can be sure that the tares (pretender Christians) have been planted by the devil among the Lord's congregations.

We can also be sure that there are almost always lost people among the congregations of the the Lord. We must be sure to evangelize not only outside the fellowship, but within the congregation as many may still be without Christ. Peter tells us that even among the professing church, "*the righteous is scarcely saved*" (1 Peter 4:18). We do not often think of the mission field being located within the church doors, but I believe it is probably one of the most needy mission fields of all. When Jesus said the wheat and the tares abide together until the harvest, He was explaining that the saved and the lost are side by side in the congregations until His Second Coming.

Good Trees vs. Bad Trees

Nature can only produce its own kind. A banana stalk can produce only bananas. Grapevines can produce only grapes. And unregenerate hearts can only produced actions that fall short of the glory of God. A person can only begin to produce good fruit when they are given a good heart in regeneration. Many in the churches say they are born again, but the fruit of their life speaks louder than the empty profession of faith they make. Those that lack the good fruit of the good (regenerate) heart will ultimately sent to everlasting destruction. Until that time, both true and false converts abide together in the churches. Listen to the words of Jesus:

*Are grapes gathered from thornbushes, or figs from thistles?
So, every healthy tree bears good fruit, but the diseased tree*

bears bad fruit. A healthy tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a diseased tree bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus you will recognize them by their fruits (Matthew 7:16-20).

Wolves in Sheep's Clothing

The true and false converts are not limited to the lay people but extends also to the leadership of the church. The Bible is filled with warnings about false teachers who would come into the churches in the name of Christ but would inwardly be “*ravenous wolves*.” Outwardly they look like Christians, but they have a pagan heart (Matthew 7:15). Paul says of them, “*by smooth talk and flattery they deceive the hearts of the naive*” (Romans 16:18).

Jesus says we should be able to recognize false teachers and by implication false professors of Christ. There is superficial fruit produced by these false Christians without any real inward heart commitment or nature change. Consider Matthew 7:15-16:

Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves. You will recognize them by their fruits.

We are told that true Christians can distinguish a false prophet (and by implication a false convert) by carefully observing their fruits, which would include their life, their words, their attitudes, etc. We know what is in the heart of a person comes out of the mouth and into the life for “*out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks*” (Matthew 12:34). A person with a bad and evil heart can change the outward—he may even be considered and accepted to be a Christian by

many. Yet if he does not have the nature change of the new birth, he is nothing more than a “*ravenous wolf*” no matter what painted pageantry he puts on the outside. Paul gives specific admonition to the elders in looking out for false converts and false teachers. He says to the elders in Ephesus:

*Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood. I know that after my departure **fierce wolves** will come in among you, not sparing the flock (Acts 20:28-29).*

The Good and Bad Fish

In Matthew 13, we have another comparison of the two types of people in the church. Through the parable of the dragnet gathering both good and bad fish, Christ represents the true and the false converts being gathered in the visible churches.

Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was thrown into the sea and gathered fish of every kind. When it was full, men drew it ashore and sat down and sorted the good into containers but threw away the bad. So it will be at the close of the age. The angels will come out and separate the evil from the righteous and throw them into the fiery furnace (Matthew 13:47-50).

When the Gospel goes forth, the message gathers many people into the local congregation, but not all of the people have been genuinely born again. Terry Johnson comments on the illustration Jesus uses:

[The kingdom of heaven] is like a ‘dragnet,’ Jesus says. The fisherman of the ancient world used two kinds of nets, circular hand-nets that were cast from shore, and square dragnets that

were pulled between two boats or by ropes from shore. The ends of the dragnet would be brought around to form a great cone in which fish and all manner of things were caught....both the true and false believer will profess faith in Christ. The net catches both.... This means that the church, Christian institutions, and Christianized institutions are a 'mixed bag' until the end of the world. There will be many who we caught up in the nets, who for one reason or another have professed faith in Christ, joined the church, put stickers on their car bumpers or business cards, who because known publicly as Christians turn out to be an embarrassment to the Christian community. They may have professed commitment to Christ as an adult and very publicly, or they may have been brought up in the church. Either way, there are those who are in the net who have been drawn out of the sea (world), but who are hypocrites. They are not real Christians.... There is bad fish among the good. They stink. They are rotten. They are unclean.²⁰⁰

Johnson goes on to say:

The church is made up of wheat and tares, of good and bad fish that get caught in our nets. This means that we will encounter people in the church halls who are gossips and unkind. As we travel around town someone may come to one of us and ask, 'Isn't so and so an officer in your church?' They ask because they are amazed or appalled by the way Mr. So and So runs his business, or leaves bills unpaid, or neglects his children, or breaks his marriage vows.... Jesus says, 'I warned you.' There are bad apples in the barrel, rotten eggs in the basket.²⁰¹

²⁰⁰ Terry Johnson. *The Parables of Jesus* (Geanies House, Fearn, Ross-shire, Scotland, UK: Christian Focus Publications, 2007), 174-178.

²⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 178.

As much as faithful pastors try to maintain a regenerate church membership, it is quite impossible to regulate it perfectly. The churches will not be sorted out until Jesus Christ comes again and gives a final reckoning. At that time He shall “*throw them* [that is, the false converts] *into the fiery furnace*” of eternal damnation (*Matthew 13:50*).

Four Soils (True & False Conversions)

In Mark 4, we have true and false converts compared to one another. In the parable of the four soils (or four hearts), we have a complete unbeliever, two false converts, and a true believer compared. Four types of hearts represented by soils, but only one out of the four are truly saved. The false converts even seem to bring forth some measure of fruit. We must ask the question: is it possible for the Word of God to make some penetration into the human heart, at least to the extent that it is understood and superficially received and yet the person ultimately be lost? *Apparently it is quite possible.*

Let’s examine these four kinds of hearts. It is probably best to put them in three categories: the unbeliever, the make believers, and the true believer.

The Heart of the Unbeliever

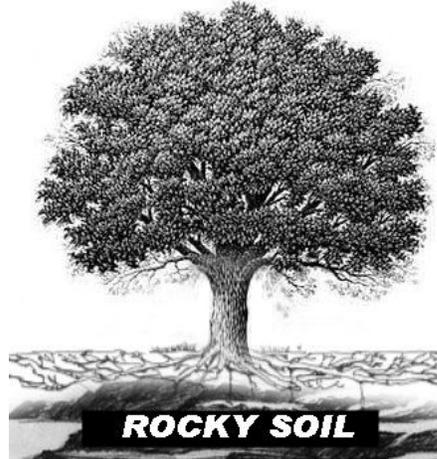
The seed sown by the wayside was rejected. The is the person who hears the Gospel, but it could not penetrate his hard heart. This person does not even profess to be saved.

The Heart of the Make Believers

Christ goes on to describe two false converts. We learn to spot false converts by the many characteristics Christ gives of them. Let's take a look at them.

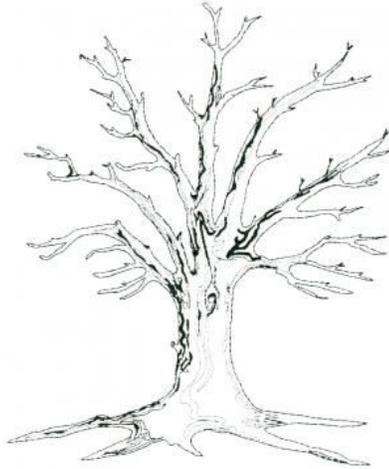
Immediate results

With a false convert, according to Mark 4:5, there are immediate results—*“immediately it sprang up, since it had no depth of soil.”* The person agrees with the Gospel, but he has not weighed what it really means. He immediately gives credence to something he has not deeply pondered and does not entirely understand. He accepts Christ superficially. He is not shaken to his core because of the great sin in his life or the awesome holiness of God. He does not tremble before a holy God. Yet, immediately there are fantastic results. He may attend every service of the church. Perhaps he starts tithing. He even responds to the messages at times with a public “Amen!” Compared to other true believers, he may even seem to have more fruit than they have. He seems to be too good to be true, and in fact he is. He is shallow: *“immediately it sprang up, since it had no depth of soil.”* There is no depth of understanding. The Gospel has not taken root.



Shallow Roots

Mark 4:6 says, “*when the sun rose, it was scorched, and since it had no root, it withered away.*” Christ explains what this means in Mark 4:16-17, “*when they hear the word, immediately receive it with joy. And they have no root in themselves, but endure for a while; then, when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately they fall away.*” The sunlight is representative of the “*tribulation or persecution*” that come with the trials of life and also of the persecution that comes by being identified with Jesus Christ. The false convert has no deep roots of assurance that Christ is the Almighty Saviour and merciful God, and that as such has all things in His absolute control. Therefore, when the sunlight of difficulties come, the false convert’s flashy and immediate results begin to



wither up and die. If you could see beneath the surface, you would understand why. The tree that had seemed to flourish has shallow roots. The false convert lacks the moisture and nourishment of the deep understanding of the Gospel. His heart is still bedrock and stubborn, and so the false convert falls away and returns to the world of sin.

A true believer on the other hand has a deep understanding of Christ’s ability to save and His control of all things. When tribulation, temptation and persecution come, the true believer flourishes, because He finds Christ’s grace sufficient in

impossible situations. His roots go deep into the very person of Christ.

Receives the Word with Gladness but Falls Away

The false convert initially receives the Word of God with joy and gladness (Mark 4:16; Matthew 13:20)—even with tears. If every one who heard the Gospel from me and received it with tears of fear and joy were still serving Christ today, we would have a much larger congregation! I think every faithful pastor can attest to the fact that many seem to respond with conviction and later joy, but for every ten that respond, perhaps one continues on. They do “*believe*” for a season (Luke 8:13). Yet it is not a saving faith, because it is not mixed with repentance. Faith, if it does not reveal itself in the life, is no faith at all, but a dead faith. Jesus said, “*No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God*” (Luke 9:62).

No Fruit

In false converts, there is a superficial root, but they “*withered away, because [they] had no moisture*” (Luke 8:6). Christ said, “*And others are the ones sown among thorns. They are those who hear the word, but the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches and the desires for other things enter in and choke the word, and it proves unfruitful*” (Mark 4:18-19). Indeed, the false convert bears no fruit because his heart has never been changed. He still has a weedy unregenerate heart that chokes the Gospel with the cares of this world. There are immediate tangible results, but the results are superficial because conversion has not occurred. When the false convert is really put to the test he goes back to his own ways. The false

convert seemed to grow momentarily—yet his weedy heart had not been changed. His unregenerate heart is again filled with anxieties, allowing this world to have the first place in the heart over Jesus Christ. The false convert does not produce fruit because he was never given the new heart of the true believer in the first place.

The Heart of the True Believer

Mark chapter 4 tells of the person with a good heart represented by soil without the weeds and stony ground of resistance to the Gospel seed. Obviously, there is no one who naturally has a tender heart for God or even seeks after God (Romans 3:10-11). Every one of us is infested with the weeds and stones of pride and rebellion. God must clear the soil of weeds and stones through the work of the Spirit of God in the heart (Ezekiel 36:27). When the heart is prepared and cultivated by God, it can rightly be called “*good ground*”. Whenever the Gospel seed falls into good ground it bears noticeable, meaningful fruit in varying degrees. Christ says that the true believer is one that will “*hear the word and accept it and bear fruit, thirtyfold and sixtyfold and a hundredfold*” (Mark 4:20). Let it be understood that while every believer does not bear the same amount of fruit, every believer does bear the same kind of fruit!

What About Those Described in Hebrews 6?

Having looked at the true and false believers side by side in Christ’s congregation, we come back to one of the most pivotal, compelling, and controversial (for some) passages in the New Testament.

What these passages teach is that not every person who has claimed to be saved is truly born again. Salvation does not come by walking an aisle or by being baptized or adding one's name to a church roll. Our modern churches houses are filled with many people who do not have the life of God in them. It is to these people that stern warnings like Hebrews 6 and Hebrews 10 are issued.

The “Once Enlightened” Crucify Christ Afresh

In Hebrews 6, the apostle, probably Paul, speaks to Jews about some of them that had fallen away after seeming to have tasted eternal life. These unbelievers seem to grow, but what they eventually bring forth is “*thorns and thistles*” (Hebrews 6:8). What is shocking in this passage is that the lost seem to have at least a superficial experience of true believers. Being superficially attached to Christ's church, they hear the Word of God, they sense the moving of the Holy Ghost in the midst of the congregation, and they even see some of the powers of the world to come. Yet, in the end, they fall away, and they manifest their true selves by bringing forth fruit that is “worthless” and “*near to being cursed*”. So foul is their fruit that it is equated to crucifying Christ “*once again*” and putting Him “*to contempt*”. Their destiny is “*to be burned*”. Consider the apostle's own words:

For it is impossible, in the case of those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, and have shared in the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come, and then have fallen away, to restore them again to repentance, since they are crucifying once again the Son of God to their own harm and holding him up to contempt. For land that has drunk the

rain that often falls on it, and produces a crop useful to those for whose sake it is cultivated, receives a blessing from God. But if it bears thorns and thistles, it is worthless and near to being cursed, and its end is to be burned (Hebrews 6:4-8).

The false convert who falls away is in a very fearful state. There is no greater condemnation than for those who know the truth so well but reject it. Peter warns that *“it would have been better for them never to have known the way of righteousness than after knowing it to turn back from the holy commandment delivered to them”* (2 Peter 2:21; cf. Hebrews 10:26-31).

Four Marks of Spiritual Illumination Superficially Experienced

There are four marks of spiritual illumination referenced in Hebrews 6:4-5 that those who eventually fall away can experience in some superficial way. These are marks of spiritual illumination on the soul which is not always accompanied by salvation. A person can experience spiritual illumination superficially in his heart and never be saved. What are these marks of spiritual illumination?

Enlightenment

“For it is impossible, in the case of those who have once been enlightened ...” (Hebrews 6:4a). It is amazing how much light those who fall away have. A person can have a great deal of common spiritual knowledge and still fall short of heaven.

There are some people in this world who have been brought to the realization that the Gospel is the truth, and yet they do not embrace it and appropriate it in their heart and life.

Conviction

Further, the author of Hebrews tells us that these people “*who have tasted the heavenly gift, and have shared in the Holy Spirit ...*” The heavenly gift is speaking of the Holy Spirit who is the agent of conviction. There are those who have some signs of the Spirit’s working and have felt the threatenings from heaven from God’s Law. This can cause great tears and trembling of spirit, but birth has not yet taken place. The Spirit of truth will come, and “*when he comes, he will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment*” (John 16:8). We see that the Spirit can do a work of deep conviction on a person’s heart without the person actually crossing into eternal life.

There are people in this world who have experienced the conviction of the Holy Spirit who yet remain lost. Their hearts have been aroused to the awfulness of their lost condition. Yet they resist the Holy Spirit. They resist the Word of God. They are a partaker of the Holy Spirit, sensing their own corruption and the inscrutable holiness God, yet they ultimately resist His work. They are like the Jews of the martyr Stephen’s day in Acts 7:51. Stephen said to them, “*You stiff-necked people, uncircumcised in heart and ears, you always resist the Holy Spirit. As your fathers did, so do you.*” Despite being moved from time to time in deep heavings and upheavals of soul, yet when it comes to the last remnants of self, they end up choosing and loving the idols of their heart more than the Living God and so remain unconverted.

Education

Hebrews 6:5 tells us that these people who fall away at one time “*tasted the goodness of the word of God...*”

We understand that “*faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ*” (Romans 10:17), and yet there are many people who wrongly think they are saved by their much hearing of Gospel messages or their deep learning of the Word of God. It is not the hearer of the Word that is justified but the doer (Romans 2:13; cf. 1 John 3:18). It is the one who loves and lives the Word of God out of a new heart and nature that manifests the fruit of salvation.

There are those who hear the Word over and over again and talk much of it and have learned much of the Word of God, but they are never inwardly conformed to it. They are “*always learning and never able to arrive at a knowledge of the truth*” (2 Timothy 3:7). They do not have the Word of God richly dwelling in them—it is superficially tasted.

Heavenly Impressions

False converts even experience some superficial looking to eternity—they seem to experience a superficial brush with “*the powers of the age to come*” (Hebrews 6:5). As Matthew Henry says:

...they may have been under strong impressions concerning heaven and hell, may have felt some desires of heaven, and dread of going to hell. These lengths hypocrites may go, and, after all, turn apostates.²⁰²

²⁰²Matthew Henry. *Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible : Complete and Unabridged in One Volume*. (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1996), Hebrews 6:1.

There are men and women whose hearts are convicted of the reality of the power of God. They see that God does indeed sovereignly intervene in the hearts of men. Bad men are made good, fallen women are made pure, twisted minds are made straight, and hard hearts are softened. They know that the power of God that *made* the world can *change* the world—that the God who is, is in control and that the promised kingdom of righteousness will in God’s time be a reality.

Well then, we might think these people must be saved people. Sadly they are not. Knowledge of the truth does not constitute salvation—the devils all know the truth and tremble. Realization of the love of God does not constitute salvation—Israel knew that God loved her and still turned to idolatry. Conviction by the Holy Spirit does not constitute salvation—the Sanhedrin resisted the Holy Spirit’s conviction and stoned Stephen. Believing the Bible to be the Word of God does not constitute salvation. The Pharisees believed in inerrancy, yet they knew not God. Believing in the supernatural, in miracles, or in metaphysics does not constitute salvation. The Pharisees also believed in the supernatural, but most were not raised to spiritual life. Neither is salvation is mere mental assent. The very demons believe and tremble at God, and yet they are lost and doomed to perdition (James 2:19).

We have seen the four marks of spiritual enlightenment superficially experienced. It is clear that a person can experience conviction without conversion. A person may resist the Holy Spirit though superficially connected with Christ’s people. Yet a person can resist the privileges of God’s grace only for so long before God removes His conviction all together. When that occurs and the person falls away, we will see one impossibility.

One Impossibility

“For it is impossible...”, says the apostle, “...if they fall away, to renew them again to repentance” (Hebrews 6:4,6, NKJV). As Hebrews 10:26 says, “For if we go on sinning deliberately after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins...” These verses refer to the unpardonable sin, that of a final willful rejection of God’s grace. If that occurs, God judiciously removes His grace altogether and entirely, so that there remains no way for the person to be saved.

It is one thing to crucify Christ ignorantly. It is a whole other thing to knowingly hear the Gospel and act as if you know Christ while inwardly rejecting Him. Listen to the strong language of this passage.

“For it is impossible...if they fall away, to renew them again to repentance, since they crucify again for themselves the Son of God, and put Him to an open shame” (Hebrews 6:4,6, NKJV).

The Dog and His Vomit / The Pig and His Mire

Peter concurs with the writer of Hebrews and compares the one who falls away to a “dog” who returns to “his own vomit” and a clean pig who returns to “wallowing in the mire”. For these, there is no longer mercy from God.

For if, after they have escaped the defilements of the world through the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and overcome, the last state has become worse for them than the first. For it would have been better for them never to have known the way of righteousness than after knowing it to turn back from the holy

commandment delivered to them. What the true proverb says has happened to them: "The dog returns to its own vomit, and the sow, after washing herself, returns to wallow in the mire ." (2 Peter 2:20-22).

The "impossibility" is that if you play with God, God could harden your heart so that you will be reprobate—never to be renewed again to repentance. Those who claim new life in Christ without possessing the genuine new birth continually put Jesus to an open shame. A person cannot play with the atonement of Christ as if it is something to trifle with.

There are those who seem to have some branches coming out of their life, but they never bear any fruit. Sure, they are enlightened to the truth. They experience the conviction of the Holy Spirit. They understand the authority of Scripture. They are conscious of the power of God and the realities of eternity. And yet they reject the authority of God's Son as their Lord! God may very easily harden a person's heart to the truth. What then is the end? It is to be burned, to be judged of God, to be damned in hell forever. Paul warns them with the illustration given in Hebrews 6:7-8,

For land that has drunk the rain that often falls on it, and produces a crop useful to those for whose sake it is cultivated, receives a blessing from God. But if it bears thorns and thistles, it is worthless and near to being cursed, and its end is to be burned.

Somewhere there is a point of no return. Where that point is, only God knows. Somewhere along the line those who have known the truth reject to the point of no return. God says that it is impossible for the apostate to be renewed to repentance. He cannot return to the truth he has spurned.

Some of the most bitter and ugly people are those who at one time professed Christianity but then fell away. The mind of the apostate is so corrupted that he not only will not repent, he cannot repent. He has turned from the truth and God has turned the truth from him. In Luke 9:62, Jesus said, *No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God.*"

Be Sure!

Simply knowing or being convicted of the truth does not make one a Christian. In Acts 26:28, King Agrippa said to Paul, *"In a short time would you persuade me to be a Christian?"* What I am saying is, do not stop short of the new birth!

My heart throb and the heart throb of Hebrews 6:1-8 is *be sure!* Do not trifle with your never dying soul. If you are not saved, be honest about it. Be honest with yourself; be honest with God. Your church membership cannot save you. A good life will not save you. Being baptized will not save you. Just claiming to be a Christian will not save you.

It is one or the other. Christ is in your heart by faith, or He is not. If He is not and you are just pretending while you sit in a Bible preaching church and ignore the light that is shining upon your soul, you are in great danger of reprobation. Will you not settle this matter today?

Look again carefully and honestly at the words of Paul. 2 Corinthians 13:5, *"Examine yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Or do you not realize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?—unless indeed you fail to meet the test!"* Some professing Christians never grow because they are not Christians at all. Are you God's child? Are you in the faith? Be sure!

16

A Serious Call to a Genuine Christian Life



“The life of God united with the soul of man creates an insatiable desire for His presence. That is why if the most foundational desires of your soul are not satisfied in God, you cannot claim to be a Christian.”



O how much better than life is the presence of God.

DAVID BRAINERD²⁰³

T rue, biblical, vital Christianity is nothing less than the life of God in the soul of man. Satan at this moment is filled with glee because a satanic counterfeit has filled our churches. People believe today that you can call yourself a Christian without living a life manifestly empowered by the resurrected Christ. If you say that you are a mechanic, you expect you are going to be doing the work of a mechanic. And if you say that you are a Christian, you expect that the living, risen Christ is living inside of you and living in all of your actions.

Welcome to the Show

Some have turned Christianity into a program—a religion of actors—it has become a theater act. We read the verses in the Bible that call us to prayer and to holiness and to a love life with Christ that aches for Him and put them aside by recategorizing the Body of Christ into two parts: the carnal and the spiritual Christians. This ought not to be. Every Christian is a supernaturally reborn human being. All Christians are Holy Spirit begotten people. Christians do not live on the natural plain. The Bible says radical things about these people called Christians—that we are new creations; that we are risen with Christ; that we actually overcome the world. Yet many insist on being called Christians without any sign that Christ dwells in them. Sadly, in the past fifty years as we have ignored the doctrine of the new birth, the church has become the greatest

²⁰³ Jonathan Edwards. *Memoirs of the Rev. David Brainerd* (Oxford University Press: Oxford, UK, 1818), 207.

show on earth. We must call the show to a stop. We must call all who profess Christ to live a genuine Christian life.

The Sheep and the Goats

In each Gospel church across the world at this moment, there are both wheat and tares. There are both sheep and goats (or wolves in sheep's clothing). This is a sobering fact. One day Christ will return with all His holy angels, and He will separate the sheep from the goats (Matthew 25:31-32). He will welcome the sheep and cast away the goats forever. This is why it is vital that we clearly define what a genuine Christian life looks like.

A genuine Christian life is all or nothing. The genuine Christian is sickened by the old life, and he hungers and thirsts for God. Christianity is crucifixion of the self-life and resurrection of Christ's life within us. The Christian is dead to self and alive to God. There is no middle ground between heaven and hell. A true Christian cannot hide sin very long because he is accountable to the Almighty God who saved him and dwells in him.

The Best and Worst of People in Christ's Church

In the church we have the very best of people and the very worst of people. God has humbled the heart of many in the church. These are the best of people. They have come to the end of themselves. They live a cross-centered life in public and more importantly in private when no one sees them but God. These people are good, not inherently, but because God is in them, and God is good, and God comes out of them. God's very presence, the very essence of beauty and goodness is in the genuine believer. They are far from perfect, but they love prayer

and holiness and the assembly of the saints as these things are the means of grace where Christ is found, worshipped and glorified. These are the best of people in the church.

Also, the very worst of people are in the church. There are those who wear the holy Name of Jesus Christ and drag it through the mud of their indifference and hypocrisy. They find it easy to speak of Christ and excuse the sin they love. They attend the meetings of God's people while at the same time find nothing wrong with their secret life of sin and self. Their own pride blinds them to their damnation. It would be better for them, Peter says, if these people had never known the truth, than to have known it and rejected it. We fear for these people, but what can we do? There are multitudes that know the Name of Christ but know nothing of His grace in the churches today. What can we do?

We Must Open Up the Sewers

It is only through the opening up of the sewers in the church that we can remove the hypocrisy and receive the embrace and forgiveness of Christ. The only way to receive His mercy and goodness is if we stop ignoring sin and actually deal with it. The state of our churches is much more dire than our own human hearts can comprehend. If we want the Spirit of power to rule in our midst it is going to cost us everything. We must put aside reputation, politics, and the accolades of men. We must call our people to a genuine Christian life.

The Christian's Panting Heart for God

A genuine Christian will not only desperately want God, but *only* and *exclusively* want Him, and Him alone. He has "*turned*

to God from idols to serve the living and true God” (1 Thessalonians 1:9). In fact, he has absolutely no other agenda than to be a slave of Jesus Christ. He has no plans but to seek his highest pleasure in the Person of God Himself. And then that human being, filled with the Spirit of God lives out his devotion to God in his life. This is what is accomplished in the new birth. There is a profound hungering and thirsting after God. Many have expressed this hunger. Listen to them pant after God.

Asaph (circa 1000 B.C.) said in the book of Psalms, “...it is good to be near God” (Psalm 73:28).

Aurelius Augustine of Hippo (354-430 A.D.), pastor, bishop, and prolific writer in the early church, went so far as to say: “Love God, and do what you want”.²⁰⁴ He knew that the radical love for God in the heart was enough to change all his “wants” into godly desires.

David Brainerd (1718-1747): “I never feel comfortably, but when I find my soul going forth after God: if I cannot be holy, I must necessarily be miserable forever.”²⁰⁵

Ed McCully (1927-1956), missionary martyr to the Waorani tribe of Equador: “I have one desire now, to live a life of reckless abandon for the Lord, putting all my energy and strength into it.”²⁰⁶

David understood what it was to pant after God because he was a born again man. The very reason David was thirsting for God is because no one and nothing else satisfied the deep

²⁰⁴ Donald E. Gowan. *The Westminster Theological Wordbook of the Bible* (Philadelphia: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003), 105.

²⁰⁵ Edwards. *Memoirs of Brainerd*, 77.

²⁰⁶ Elisabeth Elliot. *Through Gates of Splendor* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1986), 50-51.

spiritual cravings of his new nature. This was true whether he was in a desert or in a palace. David lived out his hunger for God—he was a real, genuine, bonafide believer. David knew no one but God could satisfy him, and he could be satisfied even in the most barren times in his life.

God illustrated this to David in a profound ways throughout his life. First, the prophet Samuel had anointed David to be king. David's seven brothers all passed before Samuel while David was in the field keeping the sheep. God promised little David the kingdom that day. We are not really sure, but we guess that he was in the teenage years that day. He did not become King until he was 30, and along the way, he became an exile and a fugitive. He knew he was to be King of Israel. God had said so. God's prophet had anointed him. Yet he woke up in caves and was coated with the dust of the wilderness that made his body and soul dry. David had nothing out there in the wilderness, except the promises of God. David had come to the end of himself. He had absolutely nothing but God. There was no difference between David's prayers and his life. For a true Christian, there is no difference between his devotions and his devotion.

Later on in his kingdom, David again had to flee to this same wilderness when his own son, Absalom hijacked the kingdom from him. Again, he went from being on top of the world to a wanderer. That was a bad week for David! He had no other promises but the promises of God. He was emptied of himself. His situation was dry like his soul. As David is on the run, he turns to God to fill his soul. He writes this 63rd Psalm, which says:

O God, you are my God; earnestly I seek you; my soul thirsts for you; my flesh faints for you, as in a dry and weary land

where there is no water. So I have looked upon you in the sanctuary, beholding your power and glory. Because your steadfast love is better than life, my lips will praise you. So I will bless you as long as I live; in your name I will lift up my hands. My soul will be satisfied as with fat and rich food, and my mouth will praise you with joyful lips, when I remember you upon my bed, and meditate on you in the watches of the night; for you have been my help, and in the shadow of your wings I will sing for joy. My soul clings to you; your right hand upholds me. But those who seek to destroy my life shall go down into the depths of the earth; they shall be given over to the power of the sword; they shall be a portion for jackals. But the king shall rejoice in God; all who swear by him shall exult, for the mouths of liars will be stopped (Psalm 63:1-11).

R. A. Torrey recounts D. L. Moody's commitment to be wholly dedicated to God while he was with his friend Mr. Henry Varley.

Henry Varley, a very intimate friend of Mr. Moody in the earlier days of his work, loved to tell how he once said to him: "It remains to be seen what God will do with a man who gives himself up wholly to Him." I am told that when Mr. Henry Varley said that, Mr. Moody said to himself: "Well, I will be that man. And...it remains to be seen what God will do with a man who gives himself up wholly to Him."²⁰⁷

Moody got his inward hunger and thirst from his new heart. It is the desire of every Christian to give himself away for Jesus Christ as a "*living sacrifice*" (Romans 12:1-2). He may

²⁰⁷ R. A. Torrey. *Why God Used D. L. Moody* (Whitefish, MT: Kessinger Publishing, 2006), 10.

not always be successful, but he will have some measure of success for it is the work of God. There is always some measure of fruit (Matthew 7:20; James 2:20).

Beware of Convenient Christianity

Sadly many professing Christians are willing to follow Christ just so long as it is convenient. As long as Christianity is comfortable most people are willing to bear the name of Jesus Christ. But when they begin to suffer, they make excuses for not following Christ and for continuing on without a deep commitment. To make room for their self will, they claim the title of “carnal Christian”. This mindset has crept into our churches and destroyed our churches from the inside out. There is no power in many churches today. So many people who claim to know Christ have a fat head and an emaciated soul. They know so much and live so little. They are so well fed and so well dead. They know their systematic theology well, but have systematized God right out of their lives. With heads puffed up with theological knowledge, their heart and life are empty of God and filled with love for self and the world. Their Christianity costs them little. They are willing to stay on the cross a little while as long as there is something in it for them. They have all the information about God correct. They even believe it in a way. But they have no heart to follow His directions. Many seem to believe the claims of Christ. Yet they do not act on them.

Jesus said, *“If you love me, you will keep my commandments”* (John 14:15). Those who actually follow after Christ are true Christians and no one else. Jesus said, *“Thus you will recognize them by their fruits”* (Matthew 7:20). *“Faith without works is dead”* (James 2:20, NKJV). Only those who live the

Christian life are Christians no matter what their profession is. *“And by this we know that we have come to know him, if we keep his commandments”* (1 John 2:3). *“For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome”* (1 John 5:3).

A God-Dependant, God-Saturated, God-Satisfying Life

David knew nothing of convenient faith. He believed God in deepest sorrow and distress. He found joy and happiness whatever mess he was in. Listen to the secret of David’s happiness: *“or you have been my help, and in the shadow of your wings I will sing for joy”* (Psalm 63:7). God’s shelter was over David at all times. That was David’s joy. David was filled whether in the palace or the cave. God was his sufficiency and satisfaction in the most barren times in his life. He asked God to be his help, and then he stepped out on faith and lived a God-dependent, God-saturated, God-satisfying life even when he woke up some mornings in a cold dry wilderness.

It is the Christian’s highest joy to live in the shadow of God’s presence. Holiness is happiness for the true child of God.

What Does a Genuine Christian Life Look Like?

A genuine Christian life finds its whole identity and meaning in Christ. David says, *“O God, you are my God”* (Psalm 63:1). He does not care about getting back to the palace. He does not care about the praise of men or getting back to his comfort. He wants his God and his whole identity and meaning for life are wrapped up in Him. He want it more than life. He says, *“earnestly I seek you; my soul thirsts for you; my flesh*

faints for you, as in a dry and weary land where there is no water.” This was who David was by nature. Whether in the wilderness or the palace, David was at home with God. A genuine Christian lives out who they really are when no one is looking. Who you are in the dark is who you really are. David was faithful to God because he belonged to God. He called Him “*my God*”.

My wife wears my name, and I expect her to be faithful to me. If you wear the name of Jesus Christ, you had better be faithful to Him. What would you call a man that was faithful to his wife in public, but not in private? An adulterer. And so it is with the hypocrite. A hypocrite can profess Christ, but his life demonstrates that his heart has never truly been changed.

If you are a Christian, Jesus Christ lives in you and through you. You want nothing else than to know and reflect His presence. Understand that He holds the universe in His hand—He could crush us all in a moment, but He is the most brokenhearted, merciful, meek, loving, self-sacrificing Person, and He lives in us! If Christ lives in you, He will live through you. You can call Him “*my God*” as David did.

Genuine Christianity Begins with an End of Self

Do you want true, vital Christianity? If you want it, you must forsake all and follow Christ as your God and your all. He must own you and you must claim Him. It will cost you everything. Jesus said, “*If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me*” (Mark 8:34).

David knew the most foundational desires of his soul could not be satisfied by the pleasures of this world. He knew he did not need to be king to satisfy his desires. David knew himself to

be nothing as a shepherd boy. That had not changed when he became king because he was still nothing. What is a king? What is a president in comparison to God? We are all paupers in the sight of God. David never forgot that reality. A person with the Holy Spirit of God in them believes themselves to be absolutely nothing.

Everything David's flesh could want in that ancient world, he had in the palace. Yet having lost it all, he desires not the selfish pleasures of the palace but the presence of God. We read David's words, and we see that he has lost himself in God. He says, "*O God, you are my God; earnestly I seek you; my soul thirsts for you*" (Psalm 63:1). No mention of the self life is made. He does not pray for status, possessions, or comfort. Self is nowhere to be found in David's words. He had come to the conclusion that nothing he could seek on earth could gratify what his soul needed. God and God alone could offer his soul the deep satisfaction he was longing for. These are the cravings of the new heart. Flesh and self are conspicuously absent.

Take Up Your Cross

God will not be found without an end of self. Christianity from beginning to *end* is a call to die to self and to live to God. The most graphic illustration of what Christianity is defined to be is the very cross of Jesus Christ. He said if you follow me you must take up your cross and nail your agenda to it. Paul said, "*I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me*" (Galatians 2:20). Before Jim Elliot left for Ecuador, from which he would never return because of martyrdom, he wrote

his mother: “Remember we have bargained with Him who bore a cross....Our silken selves must know denial”.²⁰⁸

Going to Our Own Funeral

We must go to our own funeral. A genuine Christian life is one of giving total and absolute allegiance to God and dying to self. You will never know God unless you die to self. As Amy Carmichael wrote:

O Prince of Glory, who dost bring
Thy sons to glory through the Cross,
Let us not shrink from suffering,
Reproach or loss.²⁰⁹

We must go to the cross and to the tomb to die. Yet we will see a principle next that fills every true Christian with hope. The tomb is also a womb. Life comes out of death.

Genuine Christianity is an Experiencing of God

The pursuit of God begins with an end to self, but arrives at a *real, vital awakening experience of God*. It is in the tomb of self denial that we see our powerlessness to save ourselves. In that place of death, where we die to self, God forms a new heart in us that will conform us into the image of Christ. A Christian is one who is born again. At the second birth we get new life. That tomb becomes a womb where we are resurrected by the power of God. The life of God is united with the soul of man and creates an insatiable desire for His presence. That is why if

²⁰⁸ Ibid., 5.

²⁰⁹ Amy Carmichael as quoted by Joni Eareckson Tada. *Pearls of Great Price* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006), 178.

the most foundational desires of your soul are not satisfied in God, you cannot claim to be a Christian. David says his deepest desire was to experience God. It was not his duty that motivated him but his desire! David's prayer is not a declaration of Christianity but a demonstration of it. He says, How was this desire going to be fulfilled? It would only be fulfilled by David actually experiencing God. Every Christian has in his heart this thirst for God. I want you to see several things about the Christian's experience of God.

This experience of God eclipses the boundaries of this world.

David says *'My soul thirsts...To see Your power and Your glory'* (Psalm 63:1a, 2, NKJV). David's life revolved around his experience with God. No one can experience the living and true God without being keenly aware of it. Notice what David was seeking to experience: the power and the glory (presence) of God that he had experienced in the sanctuary or holy place. Was David in heaven? No, he was in the lonely wilderness, yet he was not alone. He understood that he did not have to be physically present at the Tabernacle to experience the glory and majesty of God. That is because as a born again person though David walked on earth he was spiritually in heaven united to God by the Holy Spirit. The believer's experience of God eclipses the boundaries of temporal time and space. He lives for and partakes of what is not seen. If any one loves this world and lives for it, he can have this world, but he will go down with it (2 Thessalonians 1:8). *"If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him"* (1 John 2:15). If your foundational desires are satisfied by this world you are not a Christian.

The genuine Christian seeks what is not found on this earth. Though he lives on earth, his experience of God transcends this world. He lives in and for what is found in the heavenlies (Ephesians 1:3; 2:6). “*And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever*” (1 John 2:17).

This experience of God is *exclusive*.

David’s whole world revolved around his love for God. “*O God, you are my God*” (Psalm 63:1). David prayed not primarily for his own earthly needs or for the needs of others. The primary focus of prayer for David was an exclusive enjoyment of God. He wanted God. He did not care if God gave him things on this earth. He was not using God as a cosmic Santa Claus or genie. He understood that God was his portion. He wanted God himself. His person. His presence. His love poured out on him.

Humanity is created for the pleasure of God. “*Worthy are you...for you created all things, and by your will they existed and were created*” (Revelation 4:11). You were not created to earn a paycheck, though you should. You were not created to build houses and eat food and sleep, though you can and should do these things. Yet, these are all secondary reasons for living.

Of course all humanity has gone astray and no longer experiences God exclusively. In fact man worships everything except God—and primarily his own will. The reformer John Calvin described man’s natural mind and heart as an idol

making factory.²¹⁰ He lamented, “Can any thing be more detestable than this madness in man?”²¹¹

But spiritually reborn people are given the new heart to “*worship the Father in spirit and truth*” (John 4:23). This supernatural desire leads us to cast away the idols in our heart and serve the true and living God (1 Thessalonians 1:9).

This experience of God is *early*.

There is an urgency to the Christian’s experience of God. For the genuine Christian, God takes precedence over all others. David prayed, “*O God, You are my God; Early will I seek You*” (Psalm 63:1, NKJV). When David says he seeks God early, he is not speaking of the time of day but that this is the first priority on his mind. Seeking God is a pre-eminent desire for the Christian. He seeks first the kingdom of God (Matthew 6:33). He says with Paul, “*For to me to live is Christ*” (Philippians 1:21). There are some things that we want, and the desire overcomes us—there is an urgency. For the Christian, the desire is for God Himself. Nothing else is more important. Everything else has to be put aside. This is the actual experiencing of the first commandment of having God alone occupy the place of God and no other. There is a supernatural desire to put God first in the Christian’s heart. Robert Murray M’Cheyne’s wrote in his memoirs, “Lord, make me as holy as a pardoned sinner can be made”.²¹² Jim Elliot prayed: “God, I pray Thee, light these idle sticks of my life and may I burn for

²¹⁰ John Calvin. *Institutes of the Christian Religion, Volume 1* (London: T. & T. Clark, 1863), 53.

²¹¹ *Ibid.*

²¹² Robert Murray M’Cheyne and Andrew A. Bonar. *Memoir of the Rev. Robert Murray M’Cheyne* (Edinburgh, Scotland: Oliphant, Anderson, and Ferrier, 1883), 163.

Thee. Consume my life, my God, for it is Thine. I seek not a long life, but a full one, like you, LORD Jesus.”²¹³ Both died before the age of thirty. The words of both express the heart cry of every Christian.

This experience of God is earnest.

David’s hunger and thirst for God was not put on. He wanted nothing else but God when he said, “...*my soul thirsts for you; my flesh faints for you, as in a dry and weary land where there is no water*” (Psalm 63:1b).

David cried out to God as a desperate man, as a little baby crying for milk from his mother. He did not care what was going on. Time stopped. He was focused on one thing and one thing only. There was a serious earnestness, like that of when someone is in serious trouble calling out for someone to help them.

God puts this earnestness into the soul of man when He engrafts the tender heart into the reborn saint of God. There is a hunger pain for the presence of God. It hurts for the genuine Christian to be living on this earth outside of the perfection of the new heavens and earth. So until the Day of Redemption comes, the Christian earnestly longs for God. He says with John, “*Come, Lord Jesus!*” (Revelation 22:20).

This experience of God is exciting.

David is jolted with joy while he is praying. He lifts up his hands to heaven, as if to touch and embrace God.

²¹³ Jim Elliot and Elisabeth Elliot. *The Journals of Jim Elliot* (Grand Rapids: Fleming H. Revell, 2002), 18.

Because your steadfast love is better than life, my lips will praise you. So I will bless you as long as I live; in your name I will lift up my hands. My soul will be satisfied as with fat and rich food, and my mouth will praise you with joyful lips.

PSALM 63:3-5

For David, this experience of God was not comparable to anything on this earth. Actually it was worth the total abandonment of his life that he might gain it. He says the experience of God is “*better than life*”—better than the very best this world could hope to offer him. This world offers a lot of counterfeit pleasures, but it can never deliver what it offers. God alone is the only one who always delivers what He promises. He is ready to give you more than you can ever handle of Him. This kind of experience filled David with overwhelming praise, to the point where he raised his hands to heaven. He was addicted to God, absolutely addicted. He was satisfied with God!

This experience of God is *enduring*.

David confesses that he is so addicted to his walk with God, that sometimes it keeps him up all night long. “[*W*]hen I remember you upon my bed, and meditate on you in the watches of the night” (Psalm 63:6). This addiction to God was something that would fill David with such energy of the Spirit of God that he would not be able to go to sleep.

Perhaps you have experienced this. God has awoken you in the night watches. He has given you such a burden to pray for someone that you continue in prayer through the night.

Think of the Lord Jesus as our example. Hebrews 5:7 tells us that “*In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and*

supplications, with loud cries and tears, to him who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverence.” Christ cried. He worshipped God with the deepest reverence and seriousness of soul. At times he would pray all night. We read of Christ in Luke 6:12, *“In these days he went out to the mountain to pray, and all night he continued in prayer to God.”* Our Saviour, the great I AM, who needed nothing, prayed with strong tears. Why did He do that? He gave us an example to show us what genuine Christianity is.

The genuine Christian’s pursuit of God is *“better than life”*; it is more important than sleep! Our spiritual hunger and thirst is stronger than what we have for food. We say with Job, *“I have treasured the words of his mouth more than my portion of food”* (Job 23:12). We hear Christ’s voice: *“Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God”* (Matthew 4:4).

Genuine Christians Have a Radical Dependence on God

David seeks God when he is in dire need. He does not look to men. Men will always fail. David instead follows hard after God who never fails or breaks even one promise. A Christian through his new nature lives in constant dependence upon God. He is constantly following hard after God—seeking God for help, strength, joy, encouragement, and security.

David describes his faith and his pursuit of God: *“My soul clings to you”* (Psalm 63:8). There is nothing half-hearted about one who is born of God. A new heart desires to follow God no matter what the cost. We have settled for a counterfeit Christianity that demands little to nothing. If we make converts without the power of God it is very difficult to ask them to live a

supernatural life. Jesus said, “*If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me*” (Mark 8:34). Yet with the high demands come God’s quickening power. God commands us to follow Christ, to be pure as He is pure, perfect as He is perfect, because He intends to give us the power for supernatural living.

The Genuine Christian Finds Strength in God-Dependence

My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me.

2 CORINTHIANS 12:9

Like David *we need to learn God-dependence* in our weakness. David understood and actually rejoiced in the mighty power of God that overshadowed him. He says, “*or you have been my help, and in the shadow of your wings I will sing for joy. My soul clings to you; your right hand upholds me*” (Psalm 63:7-8). Notice the words “*help*” and “*uphold*”. David was the strongest when he was the weakest. He rejoiced in the shadow of God’s wings. Everything the Christian needs is found in God. Like David, that ought to cause us to rejoice!

The strength that David experienced from God that was not a result of sleeping or eating or exercise. Remember David was probably very *hungry*. He was not in the palace but the desert. His dreams of being king were shattered. His marriage was shattered. Yet he was experiencing such supernatural strength that he said he could rejoice “*in the shadow of thy wings*”. David was being carried to heaven. He was “*seated...with him in the heavenly places*” (Ephesians 2:6). As Paul would later

write, he was granted something amazing in prayer that he lived out in his life—he was granted a power that was not limited, but was *“according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being”* (Ephesians 3:16).

The Genuine Christian Finds Courage in God-Dependence

The Christian finds courage in his God-dependence even if he has to stand alone. The Christian does not fear men. He receives great opposition at times, but he is fearless to face every antagonism because he is entirely dependent on God.

David spoke with great swelling words of bravery, but they were not empty words. He had the courage of a man who knew he was on the victorious side. Listen to him: *“But those who seek to destroy my life shall go down into the depths of the earth; they shall be given over to the power of the sword; they shall be a portion for jackals”* (Psalm 63:9-10). David’s dependence on God was able to squelch the temptation to fear man.

God dependent courage is a trait of all born again people. David had such courage when he slew Goliath and all the rest of the armies of Israel trembled with fear. There is an audacity, a courageousness in the God-dependent life that pushes the Christian forward past all the snares of sin and defeat.

Our Lord said, *“And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell”* (Matthew 10:28).

There are many that will try to hold the Christian back from serving God. They will say how unreasonable it is. Some will even mock the Christian for believing God so devoutly. Others

will outright oppose him. Indeed, “*all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted*” (2 Timothy 3:12). But persecution does not stop the Christian. Nothing stops the Christian from going forward for very long. We are victors, yea, more than conquerors in all things.

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? ... No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord (Romans 8:35, 37-39).

David lived a life abandoned to God no matter who was against him. He was ready to take on the world, standing alone for His God. He did not muster up courage because of his physical strength or intelligence. His courage came from outside himself: his strength came from God.

The Genuine Christian Finds Joy in God-Dependence

The Christian does not find joy in men, but in God. David says despite all these terrible things happening in his life that he has joy: “*But the king shall rejoice in God*” (Psalm 63:11a).

David rejoiced in God and in his sovereign plan. Even though David had at this time lost the kingdom to Absalom, he retained his title as “the king” for he trusted in God’s promise when he was a child. The prophet Samuel had poured the oil over his head and proclaimed God’s promise to him. He never

doubted that promise, and he would not waver now. God's sovereign plan never fails, even if it seems to be sidetracked in our eyes.

Of course we glory in nothing but God as David did. As Jeremiah 9:24 says: "...but let him who boasts boast in this, that he understands and knows me, that I am the Lord who practices steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth. For in these things I delight, declares the Lord."

The Christian's ultimate joy is not in knowing men, being famous, or receiving the acceptance or praise of men. Men fade away as the flower of a field. The Christian's joy is in He who will never faith away: "*Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever*" (Hebrews 13:8).

The Genuine Christian Finds Security in God-Dependence

A genuine Christian does not rest his faith in imperfect men or on prosperity in life, but instead finds security in God amidst unfaithful men and the unpredictable trials of life.

David trusted in the absolute sovereignty of God when he was wronged in life. In this Psalm David had been wronged by the son he loved so much, Absalom. Yet David's faith did not waver for a moment. David was radically surrendered to the plan and purpose of God in spite of all the malicious lies assaulting him. Listen to David's resolve amidst an unbearable trial of his faith: "*But the king shall rejoice in God; all who swear by him [God] shall exult, for the mouths of liars will be stopped*" (Psalm 63:11).

David was willing to take all the assaults of men without losing faith in God because he knew no matter what happened, God has the last word; he knew that God would bring everyone

into account before His throne and stop the mouths of unfaithful men since “*and all liars, their portion will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur*” (Revelation 21:8).

So many who call themselves Christians depart from God when men fail them or when trials come. True Christians are careful to keep their eyes on the Lord who never fails. The prophet Jeremiah described those with their eyes on men as “cursed” and those with their eyes on the Lord as “a tree planted by the waters” who brings forth fruit.

Thus says the Lord: “Cursed is the man who trusts in man and makes flesh his strength, whose heart turns away from the Lord. He is like a shrub in the desert, and shall not see any good come. He shall dwell in the parched places of the wilderness, in an uninhabited salt land. “Blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord, whose trust is the Lord. He is like a tree planted by water, that sends out its roots by the stream, and does not fear when heat comes, for its leaves remain green, and is not anxious in the year of drought, for it does not cease to bear fruit.” The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it? “I the Lord search the heart and test the mind, to give every man according to his ways, according to the fruit of his deeds.” (Jeremiah 17:5-10).

I know of a man who seemed to be a genuine believer. Before he came to our church he had a reputation of faithfulness within his congregation. He was known to share the Gospel with those around him. He tried to be careful in raising his children. He devoured the Bible and had an impressive knowledge of theology. He was certainly a very conscientious man. He did his best to follow everything his church and pastor told him to do—that is until his pastor gave him some very unwise advice that had devastating effects on his

family. The pastor never sought to make the situation right so the man left and began attending our church. Soon after attending our church, this man's son was diagnosed with a brain tumor. I watched as this man slowly began to depart from God. Bitterness toward his former pastor was not the main problem. This man was bitter at God for allowing his pastor to fail him and for allowing his son to live in so much pain and uncertainty. Instead of trusting in God's goodness and his sovereign plan to work all things together for good to conform him to the image of Christ, this man took the reigns of his life and went in another direction. The following is an excerpt from the last communication I had with him:

I appreciate your interest in my family, but I have no desire to ever be part of a church again. This really has nothing at all to do with you or anyone at <your church>, so you should not take this personally. It is simply based on my observation that there is very little difference at all between people in church and people in the world. Any difference is purely an illusion.

I believe this man, if his departure from God remains permanent, is one of those with the stony heart that Jesus spoke of:

But he who received the seed on stony places, this is he who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; yet he has no root in himself, but endures only for a while. For when tribulation or persecution arises because of the word, immediately he stumbles (Matthew 13:20-21, NKJV).

The man was offended because of the failures of men and the trials of life. David had a different response to men who had failed him. He rested in God's sovereignty and never wavered God's goodness and faithful plan for a moment. Are you making

man your trust or can you say that no matter what happens or who fails you are totally committed to God's plan for your good and His glory?

Conclusion

Christ called us not simply to evangelize but to make followers of Him (Matthew 28:18-20, NKJV). We are to teach "*them to observe all things*" whatsoever Christ commanded. Nominal (name only) Christianity is not Christianity at all. Christian means "Christ follower". Can we call people who do not follow Christ? There are a great multitude among the churches who claim Christianity but love the world and know nothing of a life of abiding in Christ.

My heart's desire is to call all those within professing Christianity to a genuine Christian life. This call begins with you. Are you experiencing God and living out your thirst for Him in the pursuits of your life? Is there a passion? A peace that passes understanding? A power and demonstration of the Spirit of grace? A joy unspeakable and full of glory? Is your mind in perfect peace because it is stayed on Jehovah? Are you addicted to God or is there something else in your life that you desire? Can you say with Asaph: "*Whom have I in heaven but you? And there is nothing on earth that I desire besides you*" (Psalm 73:25). Is God your desire? If so, would you commit yourself to calling those professing Christians under your influence to a genuine Christian life?

What then shall we do? If those under our influence profess Christ, we must show them examples like David and others of what authentic faith looks like. We must give all who profess Christ a serious call to a genuine Christian life.



How Then Should We Preach the Gospel?



“If I had my way, I would declare a moratorium on public preaching of ‘the plan of salvation’ in America for one to two years. Then I would call on everyone who has use of the airways and the pulpits to preach the holiness of God, the righteousness of God and the law of God, until sinners would cry out, ‘What must we do to be saved?’ Then I would take them off in a corner and whisper the gospel to them. Such drastic action is needed because we have gospel-hardened a generation of sinners by telling them how to be saved before they have any understanding why they need to be saved”²¹⁴

PARIS REIDHEAD



²¹⁴ Ray Comfort, Kirk Cameron. *The Way of the Master* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 2004), 106.

"I preached as never sure to preach again, and as a dying man to dying men."

RICHARD BAXTER²¹⁵

*H*ow careful we must be presenting the Gospel with the souls of men hanging in the balance. Thomas Goodwin once said, "To do the best work for God that can be done in this world, is to preach the gospel."²¹⁶ What a true statement, yet sadly, I believe the Gospel has been edited to such a degree in our day that many people would not recognize it, and indeed are offended by it when it is authentically presented. The new Gospel of today does not offend man's pride. It is quite user-friendly.

In much of today's evangelism, salvation is made to depend upon conformity to certain external decisions which are then identified with "coming to Christ". Instead of repentance of sin and faith in Christ that brings a radical transformation of nature and mind and life, people are told to "ask Jesus into their heart", come forward, or lift up their hand in a meeting. Immediate fruit is scarce to none. The bar for calling someone a "Christian" in most churches is quite low. The churches are brimming with so-called converts, but has there truly been a conversion, a genuine heart change?

Undoubtedly many false and temporary conversions occur because of an edited convenient Gospel message and man-centered methods that makes conversion quite attainable without God's help. When true conversions do happen, it is often in spite of these methods. Much harm can also be caused,

²¹⁵ Richard Baxter as quoted in *History and Repository of Pulpit Eloquence*, Vol. 1 (Dodd & Mead Company: New York, 1856), 209.

²¹⁶ Thomas Goodwin. *Works, Volume 7* (Edinburgh: James Nichol, 1863), 215.

however, when true salvation is confused with a superficial intellectual and or emotional response to Christ. Many who have had no godly repentance can intellectually agree with the Gospel and can sentimentally receive it as something amazing and beautiful, but without a radical heart transformation, this is *not* conversion.

The Gospel is not the superficial fluff of today which is designed for a “quick sell” by adding a two minute “sinner’s prayer” to a presentation of a ten minute message about five steps to eternal life. The Gospel is not a program of “steps” but a supernatural reconciliation with the holy God of the universe made possible by the intercession of Jesus Christ and the omnipotent power of the Holy Ghost sent from heaven in the sinner’s heart. It is the proclamation of a righteous God who has an unbending moral Law which everyone has grievously transgressed.

Normally, a person is presented with John 3:16, and given the promise of God’s love before they ever realize their everlasting guilt and condemnation. The new Gospel of today is utterly backwards. The good news does not make sense because the sinner has no idea of his awful condemnation before a just God. He is assured that God loves him, prays a prayer to accept Jesus, and is assured that he now at this moment has eternal life. Most of the time little or no outward contrition takes place.

D.L. Moody said, “It is a great mistake to give a man who has not been convicted of sin certain passages that were never meant for him. The Law is what he needs...Do not offer the consolation of the Gospel until he sees and knows he is guilty before God. We must give enough of the Law to take away all self-

righteousness. I pity the man who preaches only one side of the truth, always the Gospel and never the Law.”²¹⁷

If we do not preach the Gospel rightly, we very well may give assurance to those who have not an ounce of God’s supernatural grace in them and who are actually on their way to the devil’s hell. Assuring lost people that they are saved will not help them at all but will actually seal their damnation. If a lost person thinks he is saved it is guaranteed he will never come to Christ in faith as long as he is under that delusion. How then can we preach the Gospel so as not to create false converts? We must begin by pointing out the major errors of today’s modern and quite edited Gospel.

Christ Must Accept Us

The words most often associated with the modern Gospel presentation are that a person needs to “accept Christ as Saviour” or “receive Him into their life”. This is quite strange since neither Christ nor His apostles ever presented the Gospel in this manner. The idea is that Christ has done everything, and the only thing that lacks is your decision for Him. I saw a tract in a church I visited recently that articulated it this way: “The devil cast his vote against you, the Lord cast His vote for you, and you cast the deciding vote”.

Often the picture is painted in evangelism of a God who has done all He can to save the human race pleading with the sinner to just accept it. We see Christ begging and pleading at the door of the sinner’s heart, meanwhile all the sinner has to

²¹⁷ D.L. Moody. *Pleasure and Profit in Bible Study* (New York: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1895), 111.

do is let the Saviour in and accept Christ. John MacArthur expresses how wrong this picture is:

The gospel invitation is not an entreaty for sinners to allow the Savior into their lives. It is both an appeal and a command for them to repent and follow Him. It demands not just passive acceptance of Christ but active submission to Him as well. Those unwilling to surrender to Christ cannot recruit Him to be part of a crowded life. He will not respond to the beckoning of a heart that cherishes sin. He will not enter into partnership with one who loves to fulfill passions of the flesh. He will not heed the plea of a rebel who simply wants Him to enter and by His presence sanctify a life of continue disobedience.²¹⁸

MacArthur goes on to say, “The great miracle of redemption is not that we accept Christ, but that He accepts us.”²¹⁹

Narcissism and the Remodeled Gospel

We have turned the Gospel from the message of a God who is not obligated to rescue sinners, yet amazingly does so for the glory of His mercy and grace, to a utilitarian God, who is at man’s disposal and is useful for man’s happiness. It is no surprise that like the frog in the kettle, our churches have slowly adjusted and “improved” the Gospel to fit the utterly self-absorbed, humanistic culture around us. The pressure of our society has had such an immense effect on our presentation of the Gospel that it has turned the Gospel message from Christ-centered, with Christ as the Seeker and Mighty Saviour

²¹⁸ John MacArthur. *The Gospel According to Jesus, Revised and Expanded Anniversary Edition* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), 116.

²¹⁹ Ibid.

for wicked undeserving sinners, to self-centered with Christ as the one who has done everything to make man happy, just waiting on man to respond to His call for bliss in Heaven. Our



Narcissus, the mythological Greek youth who fell in love with himself.

culture has very much turned to the narcissism of ancient paganism. “The term narcissism is derived from a Greek myth. Narcissus was a handsome Greek youth who rejected the love advancement of the woodland spirit Echo. For punishment he was doomed to fall in love with his own reflection in a pool of water”.²²⁰

Since he could not reciprocate his love, he languished away and was transformed into a flower bearing his name, the narcissus. Today we have an entire society of narcissists which has in some measure influenced our churches, even in some cases to the watering down and even compromising of the Gospel. Indeed, it is shocking how much modern churches have remodeled the Gospel to appease the masses and build massive congregations, all the while neglecting an earnest examination of each convert.

Humanism and the Utilitarian God

Paris Reidhead (1919-1992) explains how the Gospel was changed in America from Christ-centered to man-centered just

²²⁰ Carl Casanova. *What Every Successful Person Knows* (Portland, OR: Advantage Media Group, 2007), 98.

after the Second Great Awakening in America. As a missionary in Africa, he had a spiritual crisis that left him with the conviction that much of evangelicalism had adopted utilitarian and humanistic philosophies contradictory to Biblical teaching. The end of all being, he came to believe, was not the happiness of man, but the glorification of God. He gives his explanation in his now famous message “Ten Shekels and a Shirt” from Judges 17.

...about 1850 you could mark the opening of a frontal attack upon the Word of God. Satan had always been insidiously attacking it. But now it was open season on the Book, open season on the Church, and Voltaire could declare that he would live to see the Bible become a relic and just have it placed only in museums; that it would be utterly destroyed by the arguments that he was so forcefully presenting against it.

Well, what was the effect of this? The philosophy of the day became humanism. And you could define humanism this way, humanism is a philosophical statement that declares the end of all being is the happiness of man. The reason for existence is man's happiness. Now according to humanism, salvation is simply a matter of getting all the happiness you can out of life.

Reidhead went on to say that God is not the means to the goal of man's happiness. That is idolatry. That is humanism. God is the goal.

Humanism is like an infection, an epidemic, it just goes everywhere. So it wasn't long until...it got to our generation, where the whole plan of salvation was to give intellectual assent to a few statements of doctrine. And a person was considered a Christian because he could say “uh huh” at four or five places that he was asked. If he knew where to say “uh huh”, someone would pat him on the back, shake his hand, smile broadly, and

say “Brother, you're saved!” So it had gotten down to the place where salvation was nothing more than an assent to a scheme or a formula, and the end of this was that salvation was the happiness of man because humanism has penetrated. If you were to analyze fundamentalism in contrast to liberalism of a hundred years ago as it developed, for I am not pinpointing it in time, it would be like this:

The liberal says the end of religion is to make man happy while he's alive, and the fundamentalist says the end of religion is to make man happy when he dies.

But again! The end of all of the religion it was proclaimed was the happiness of man.

...I'm afraid that it's become so subtle that it goes everywhere. What is it? In essence it's this! That this philosophical postulate that the end of all being is the happiness of man, has been sort of covered over with evangelical terms and Biblical doctrine until God reigns in heaven for the happiness of man, Jesus Christ was incarnate for the happiness of man, all the angels exist...everything is for the happiness of man.

...Do you see? Let me epitomize, let me summarize. Christianity says, “The end of all being is the glory of God.” Humanism says, “The end of all being is the happiness of man.”²²¹

So how then ought we to preach the Gospel? We cannot repackage it to please man. We must begin with God.

²²¹ Paris Reidhead. “Ten Shekels and a Shirt”, Sermon text: Judges 17. Preached at Bethany Fellowship Summer Conference, Bloomington, MN, mid-summer 1964.

Begin with God

The Gospel is the “good news” about God. If any one is seeking in this world, it is God. The holy God of the universe is seeking to reconcile guilty sinners with Himself. This is good news! The Gospel message is one of righteousness. God is perfectly righteous. Man is utterly and completely crooked and corrupt. But the “good news” is that a holy God can accept putridly wicked sinners on the basis of a righteousness that does not depend on our own behavior and performance. This message is offensive to man if it is presented correctly because it says that man’s entire performance is totally unacceptable to God. Indeed the Scriptures teach that man is of the same ilk as the devil himself. Man’s father as far as his nature goes is the devil, and the lusts of his father he will do. Natural man has no desire to seek after God or to understand God (Romans 3:11; 1 Corinthians 2:14). Man apart from Christ is very content and happy with his sin, *thank you very much*. Yet God, the Seeker, has made a way of righteousness for wicked man.

God is Not Like Us

We must be clear who we are asking sinners to come to. He is an infinitely holy God and will not tolerate sinners in His presence. This is not the God of most people’s imaginations.

The majority of people in the world speak about God, but in reality, it is not the true God but a remodded god of their imagination, acceptable to the sinner, because this god is made in the sinner’s likeness and image.

The true Gospel begins with the fact that God is not at all like man. God says to Asaph: “...*you thought that I was one like yourself. But now I rebuke you and lay the charge before you*”

(Psalm 50:21). The true God is infinitely higher and holier and incomprehensible (Isaiah 55:8-9; Isaiah 6; 1 John 1:5; Romans 11:33). Everyone wants to talk about their “god” but they are often greatly offended at the one true God of the Bible who is absolutely unbending in His holiness and meticulous in His justice.

God is the Judge of All the Earth

When speaking with someone about Christ, it is best to begin with the inevitable statistic: ten out of ten people will die and upon death will stand before this holy and just God (Hebrews 9:27). The standard for entrance into heaven is not that our good outweighs our bad (cf. Isaiah 64:6), or that we’ve “prayed the prayer” or that we have tried to make ourselves better. God’s standard for entrance into heaven is absolute perfection and sinlessness (Matthew 5:48). God will bring all people, both great and small, to account. There is coming a day “*on that day when, according to my gospel, God judges the secrets of men by Christ Jesus*” (Romans 2:16). Wise Solomon tells us that “*For God will bring every deed into judgment, with every secret thing, whether good or evil*” (Ecclesiastes 12:14). Who is it that does the judging? Christ alone judges every human being. “*The Father judges no one, but has given all judgment to the Son*” (John 5:22). What shall He do when He judges?

When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats... And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life (Matthew 25:31-32, 46).

God is Holy

Most people will admit that they expect to stand before God one day. Yet, as I said, most people's concept of God is not in line with the Scriptures. Most have created a god just like themselves. "God would never condemn me because I would never condemn me!" Or so the argument goes.

Yet God's holiness is unspeakably greater than any man can imagine. His standard is not that we try harder or that we aim for our good to outweigh our bad. His standard is pristine perfection. We must be absolutely sinless to enter into the Presence of the Infinite Almighty and Impeccable God. Angels proclaim His holiness day and night. One sin equals eternal death in hell. There are no exceptions. God is a righteous and a just God. He will not allow your sins or mine to slide by. God is good and righteous and holy, and He must be meticulous in bringing every one of us into personal account for every word, deed, and thought. He judges the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

God and the Mafia

My grandfather came to America from Scotland just after World War I and found employment working for the infamous gangster in the Chicago area by the name of Al Capone. Grandpa was a laundry man for Capone and also was a light weight boxer for the fights Capone staged in the evenings. Once my grandpa married my grandmother, Al told him he had to find another job. He did not want the liability of a family man getting hurt and then having to worry about a widow and orphans.

The mafia does not work on a just basis. In gangster life, bribes are gladly accepted by the mafia bosses in order to override justice. A little money will wipe away a mountain of transgressions.

God is not like the mafia bosses. He will not barter on Judgment Day. He cannot accept anything but perfect righteousness. He will meticulously judge sinners. He will have no mercy on that day. One must be either perfectly righteous (utterly sinless) or be cast into hell. This is a frightening proposition since “*Surely there is not a righteous man on earth who does good and never sins*” (Ecclesiastes 7:20). Yet God must be just and holy, else He cannot be good, and He cannot be God. This seems quite unreasonable to the natural man. It is offensive to his sense of goodness. Most people believe themselves to be quite good. Yet the fact still remains that Adam’s entire race is infinitely removed from true goodness and remains in self-deceived blindness unless God graciously grants spiritual sight.

The Depravity and Inability of Man

Because man is blind to his sin, he is unspeakably more depraved and immoral than he is capable of imagining. Missionary David Brainerd came close when he said: “Oh, how amazing it is that people can talk so much about men's power and goodness; when, if God did not hold us back every moment, we should be devils incarnate!”²²² Man cannot naturally comprehend his sinfulness because he cannot perceive the awesome holiness of God. It is even as Moses said

²²² Jonathan Edwards. *Memoirs of the Rev. David Brainerd: Missionary to the Indians on the Borders of New-York, New-Jersey, and Pennsylvania: Chiefly Taken from His Own Diary* (Oxford University Press: Oxford, UK, 1818), 129.

to the children of Israel after forty years of wandering, “*But to this day the Lord has not given you a heart to understand or eyes to see or ears to hear*” (Deuteronomy 29:4).

God never condones sin of any kind but meets it with infinite condemnation. The slightest of sins is so awful that God says, “*the soul who sins shall die*” (Ezekiel 18:4). Because of our sin, we cannot escape death. Truly “*the wages of sin is death*” (Romans 6:23). We all therefore have an appointment with death that we will not miss. “*And just as it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment*” (Hebrews 9:27). Our eternal death warrant is written with every sin committed. Death is not only physical, but spiritual and eternal.

Most men are offended that God would not only execute them for their sin (in physical death), but punish them for it forever in the torment and eternal pain of everlasting hellfire.

Man’s Greatest Enemy: Himself

Who is man’s greatest enemy? Who keeps man in constant slavery to sin, urging him to ignore and despise God and to love self? It is none other than man himself. Man’s greatest misery comes from himself. He loves his own sin. He loves that he is the captain of his own life. His life seems right and good in his own eyes. “*There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way to death*” (Proverbs 16:25). Man is blinded by his own pride. The entire human race is self-deceived. “*Most men will proclaim each his own goodness*” (Proverbs 20:6, NKJV). Mankind live in a state of spiritual blindness with darkened hearts (Ephesians 4:18). They will never come to God and can never seek God unless God on their own (Romans 3:11). He is dead in trespasses and sins (Ephesians 2:1).

Man Accustomed to Sin's Stench

The lost person is naturally unaware of the depth of his sin. He is like a garbage collector. He is around the garbage all day long, and the stench of the garbage is no longer offensive to him. In the same way, the sinner is used to his sin. It is not an offense to him, and he does not understand why it should be an offense to God. He does not see the immeasurable height of God's holiness or the depth of man's moral filth. What hope, then does any human being have in the hands of a just and holy God?

Can God Remain Just and Allow Sinners into Heaven?

God being Who He is, making no exceptions in meting out the just punishment for sin, how can He accept sinners into His presence? If God is holy and man is sinful, then the two cannot dwell together. The very nature of God's goodness repulses at every transgression. The justice of God demands that He meticulously punish every transgression, whether in word, thought, or deed. No sin can go unpunished. Could God possibly let just one wretched sinner into heaven? What about just one sin? No, it is impossible. Remember that the angel Lucifer committed one sinful act of treacherous pride, and it made him the devil. How then is anyone saved, especially since mankind "*drinks injustice like water*" (Job 15:16)? Paul wrote the book of Romans to answer this question. The third chapter is the centerpiece of Holy Scripture. It is the most important chapter in the Bible. To understand what Paul is saying, let's take a brief look at the first two chapters.

Romans 1: Condemnation of the Pagan World

In Romans 1, Paul shows the condemnation of Gentiles (lost, pagan, non-Jewish people). Even though most own no Bible and many have never even heard the Name of Jesus, they remain guilty and without excuse knowing Who God is through nature, *“for what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse”* (Romans 1:19-20). All people are without excuse, because even though they know the truth, *“by their unrighteousness [they] suppress the truth”* (Romans 1:18).

Romans 2: Condemnation of the Religious World

In Romans 2, Paul speaks to those religious people who think they *“will escape the judgment of God”* (verse 3) because of their deep knowledge of God’s Word. The religious person presumes upon the goodness of God, but God’s standard is not knowledge of God’s Word alone, but a deep heart response of repentance. Paul warns these knowledgeable, but unrepentant Jews: *“because of your hard and impenitent heart you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath when God’s righteous judgment will be revealed”* (verse 5). So what is the answer? How can the religious and pagans be justified? Paul points to the need for the new birth: *“For no one is a Jew who is merely one outwardly, nor is circumcision outward and physical. But a Jew is one inwardly, and circumcision is a matter of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter. His praise is not from man but from God”* (verses 28-29). Paul then takes

Romans 3 and explains in detail how this new birth can take place for both the religious and pagans.

Romans 3: How Can God Accept Sinners?

In Romans 3, Paul show how both the religious world and the pagan world are all under the condemnation of God. Paul asks “*are we Jews [religious people] any better off [than the pagans]? No, not at all. For we have already charged that all, both Jews and Greeks, are under sin*” (verse 9). The point Paul is making is that whether a person is religious and knowledgeable of God’s Word or pagan and ignorant of His Word, all are condemned justly before God. A never ending hell awaits every sinner on earth. This is offensive, so Paul must make his case. Paul begins with God’s view of mankind.

The Purpose of the Law

In Romans 3:10-18, the Apostle Paul gives a description of mankind from God’s perspective. Indeed, he quotes from Psalm 14 with God looking down from heaven into the hearts of the children of men. “*The Lord looks down from heaven on the children of man, to see if there are any who understand, who seek after God*” (Psalm 14:2). The shocking assesment from the Maker of heaven and earth is that “*they have all turned aside; together they have become corrupt; there is none who does good, not even one*” (Psalm 14:3). Paul adds, “*no one understands; no one seeks for God*” (Romans 3:11). Paul then proceeds to describe the depravity of all men. They use their entire body and mind to defy God and to go their own way. Spiritually, they stink like an open rotting grave. They lie like snakes. Polluted words of cursing and bitterness flow out of

their mouth. They have no mercy on others when it comes to getting their own way because they are currently enemies of God. We are all like Adam, running away from God and hiding, never knowing His peace or being reconciled with Him. “*There is no fear of God before their eyes*” (Romans 3:18). No one trembles before God. No one lives with an eye toward Him. God gave the Law, the Ten Commandments to reflect back to us our radical sinfulness. If someone insists on coming to God by works, then he must live sinlessly perfect according to God’s Law. Not only has every one of us not kept God’s Law—in fact, we’ve done nothing but break God’s Law. No one believes that. That is why people everywhere boast about their good deeds; “*Most men will proclaim each his own goodness*” (Proverbs 20:6, NKJV).

Instead of boasting, the sinner must see Himself as God sees Him, and that can be accomplished only through the Law of God. The Bible tells us that God gave the Law to us not as rules to live by, but as an alarm that will awake us to our deep sinfulness “*that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable to God*” (Romans 3:19). If anyone is to be saved, he must see his guilt and condemnation before a holy, righteous, uncompromising God.

The Law is a Mirror

Paul tells us in Romans 3:20 that through the Law “*comes knowledge of sin*”, and therefore we can think of it as a mirror. It reveals the truth about every one of us. It makes sinners honest about their guilt and sin and the inevitability of condemnation without a merciful Saviour. It holds all of us accountable to admit our infinite guilt and condemnation before God.

Charles Spurgeon said, “The Law is also very useful, because it shows us our defections and stains. It is like the looking-glass which my lady holds up to her face, that she may see if there be any spot on it. But she cannot wash her face with the looking-glass. When the mirror has done its utmost then there are the same stains. It cannot take away a single spot, it can only show where one is. And the Law, though it reveals our sin, our shortcomings, our transgressions, it cannot remove the sin or the transgression. It is weak for that purpose, because it was never intended to accomplish such an end.”²²³

Law to the Proud, Grace to the Humble

The Law of God is what brings the knowledge of the depth of sin and the terrible accounting we will all give before the bar of God’s justice. Jonathan Edwards explains that whether we realize it or not, every one outside of Christ is already under the just condemnation of God’s Law.

They are already under a sentence of condemnation to hell. They do not only justly deserve to be cast down thither, but the sentence of the law of God, that eternal and immutable rule of righteousness that God has fixed between him and mankind, is gone out against them, and stands against them; so that they are bound over already to hell. John 3:18. ‘He that believeth not is condemned already.’ So that every unconverted man properly belongs to hell; that is his place; from thence he is, John 8:23. ‘Ye are from beneath.’ And thither he is bound; it is

²²³ Charles Haddon Spurgeon. *Barbed Arrows from the Quiver of C.H. Spurgeon* (New York: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1896), 267.

the place that justice, and God's word, and the sentence of his unchangeable law assign to him.²²⁴

In God's plan, He gave His holy Law to bring human beings into the deep knowledge or their condemnation. Before one can preach the "good news", the sinner must come to a point of profound desperation and wretchedness over his sin. The Law is "*our tutor to bring us to Christ*" (Galatians 3:24, NKJV). The Law as the tutor teaches us that we cannot save ourselves. We are condemned, and the Law is given to convince us of that and to show us our ruin and misery and helplessness to save ourselves. So proud are human beings that without the Law, "*Most men will proclaim each his own goodness*" (Proverbs 20:6, NKJV). God's Law reveals that all human beings are liars, thieves, adulterers, blasphemers, idol worshippers, Sabbath-breakers, covetous, and rebels against parents and other authorities. Our guilt is quite evident. Paul clearly states that the purpose of the Law is "*that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable to God*" (Romans 3:19).

Remember Jesus' words to the religious hypocrites? He said, "*I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance*" (Luke 5:32). Those who think they are righteous are proud, and they will never be saved as long as they are under that delusion. Since God resists the proud and gives grace to the humble, we must have a way to humble the pride of man. How can the great beast of man's pride be brought low and tamed? Romans 3:20 is the key to bringing man's pride to the dust: "*through the law comes knowledge of sin.*" In other words, the

²²⁴ Jonathan Edwards: "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God", *The Works of Jonathan Edwards, Volume 2* (Bellingham, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 2008), 8.

Law is a mirror that brings us the knowledge that of what despicable people we really are. The Law shows us not simply that we have sinned here or there—we have done nothing but sin! Looking into the Law, we find that we are radically unfit for the presence of a holy God.

David Martyn Lloyd Jones said, “The trouble with people who are not seeking for a Savior, and for salvation, is that they do not understand the nature of sin. It is the peculiar function of the Law to bring such an understanding to a man's mind and conscience. That is why great evangelical preachers 300 years ago in the time of the Puritans, and 200 years ago in the time of Whitefield and others, always engaged in what they called a preliminary ‘Law work’.”²²⁵

Charles Spurgeon went on to say, “I do not believe that any man can preach the Gospel who does not preach the Law. The Law is the needle, and you cannot draw the silken thread of the Gospel through a man's heart unless you first send the needle of the Law to make way for it.”²²⁶

John Wesley said, “Before I preach love, mercy and grace, I must preach sin, Law and judgment.” Later he said to a friend, “Preach 90 percent Law and 10 percent grace.”

John Stott wrote, “We cannot come to Christ to be justified until we've first been to Moses to be condemned. Once we have gone to Moses and acknowledged our sin, guilt and condemnation, we must not stay there, we must leave Moses and go to Christ.”²²⁷

²²⁵ David Martyn Lloyd Jones as quoted by Ray Comfort. *The Way of the Master* (Wheaton: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc, 2004), 104.

²²⁶ Charles Haddon Spurgeon. *Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit, Volume 32, Sermon 1879, "A Plain Man's Sermon"* (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1886), 27.

²²⁷ John Stott as quoted by Bruce B. Barton. "Galatians", *Life Application Bible Commentary* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 1994), 122.

J.C. Ryle said, “People will never set their faces decidedly towards heaven and live like pilgrims until they really feel they’re endanger of hell. Let us expound and beat out the Ten Commandments and show the length and breadth and depth and height of the requirements of the Law. This is the way of our Lord in the Sermon on the Mount. We cannot do better than to follow His plan.”²²⁸

It is the Law that is “*our tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith*” (Galatians 3:24, NKJV). The Law takes the wind out of our boasting of any goodness. The Law is the mirror that shows the depth of rebellion and treachery in our soul. The Law makes us utterly helpless and desperate so that we throw ourselves upon Christ.

God saves only the one who sees himself on spiritual death row. Only the one shattered by the Law, desperate, found guilty will come to Christ for deliverance. With Isaiah, we must see the holiness of God and cry out, “*Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts!*” (Isaiah 6:5). Only those who have seen the majesty of God can feel the razor-sharp edge of God’s holiness cutting open the cancer of their iniquity. Only those who understand they deserve hell can be saved. Only then does the Gospel of God removing our eternal death sentence make any sense at all. Christ Jesus died for sinners. If a person thinks his sin is no big deal, he will never come to Jesus Christ as long as he is in that condition.

²²⁸ J.I. Packer. J.C. Ryle. *Faithfulness and Holiness* (Wheaton, IL: Good News Publishers, 2002), 114.

Christ's Blood Satisfies the Wrath of God

Can it be that God would accept a wretched soul like me? Yes! In fact He freely accepts all who come to Him. All those desperate enough to leave this world behind and follow Christ will be saved, but it is not cheap. Salvation costs us nothing, but it cost God everything. Jesus Christ is the sinner's substitute. The guilty verdict rings out to us from the Holy Spirit's conviction. The death sentence is passed. But it was Christ "*whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith. This was to demonstrate His righteousness*" (Romans 3:25). The word propitiation refers to a sacrifice that both takes away the guilt of sin and that satisfies wrath.²²⁹ When the Old Testament was famously translated into Greek by the seventy Jewish scholars around the first century before Christ, the Greek word for "propitiation" (ἱλαστήριον, *hilasterion*) is used for the Hebrew word "mercy-seat" (כַּפֹּרֶת).

This Greek word (*hilasterion*) came to denote not only the mercy-seat or lid of the ark, but also propitiation or reconciliation by blood. On the great day of atonement the high priest carried the blood of the sacrifice he offered for all the people within the veil and sprinkled with it the "mercy-seat," and so made propitiation.²³⁰

We must run to Jesus and flee from the wrath to come. There we find His mercy seat. Christ's blood removes the offence and wrath of God from us. Christ took our punishment

²²⁹ James White. *The God Who Justifies* (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 2001), 194.

²³⁰ M.G. Easton. *Easton's Bible Dictionary* (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1996), 1897.

that He might “*sanctify the people through his own blood*” (Hebrews 13:12).

The Imputation of Our Sin and Christ’s Righteousness

The Law is presented in order to bring the sinner to a point of desperation and self surrender. The Law’s proclamation to us is that God demands perfect obedience—sinless perfection. A transgression against even one of God’s laws requires everlasting damnation. What shall we do? We can do nothing. We are “still *weak*”—helpless and unable to do anything to save ourselves. Yet “*For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly*” (Romans 5:6). We must then embrace Christ and all that He has done for us on the cross to satisfy the justice of God. Through faith in His sacrificial work on the cross, we can be accepted forever by Him. In return for our sin, we receive Christ’s righteousness. Christ’s righteous life and substitutionary death far outweighs our sin and guilt. This is called “imputation”. Imputation is the exchange of my vile sin for Christ’s righteousness. David proclaimed, “*Blessed is the man against whom the Lord counts no iniquity*” (Psalm 32:2).

Christ, Who Knew No Sin, Became Sin for Us

The first transaction of imputation is the transfer of the entire weight of my sin to Christ. The condemnation and guilt that results from sin for the believer is removed and placed on Another. Christ is the only substitute for the sinner that is acceptable to God. He “*has blessed us in the Beloved*” (Ephesians 1:6). From the beginning of the world, it was preached that Christ would come into the world to exchange

His life for ours (Genesis 3:15; cf. Isaiah 53:6, 11). Christ is indeed the fulfillment of all foreshadowing seen in the sacrifices of the Old Testament. On the Day of Atonement, the high priest would place his hands on the scapegoat, symbolizing the transfer of sins from the people to the innocent substitute (Leviticus 16). Christ is therefore rightfully called “*the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!*” (John 1:29). Jesus is said to “*bear [our] iniquities*”; indeed “*the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all*” (Isaiah 53:11, 6). God the Father forsook His Son on the cross and “*made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God*” (2 Corinthians 5:21). This is a quantitative act of transfer—all my sin in its entirety, as God would see it on the Day of Judgment, is transferred to Christ. Christ propitiates (satisfies) God’s wrath (Romans 3:25). The root word for propitiation (ἰλασθηριον) in the Bible indicates the “quality or state of cheerfulness...gladness, wholeheartedness, graciousness”²³¹ It is just as the prophet Isaiah foretold long ago: *Out of the anguish of his soul he shall see and be satisfied; by his knowledge shall the righteous one, my servant, make many to be accounted righteous, and he shall bear their iniquities*” (Isaiah 53:11). God is satisfied, cheerful, and glad to receive us on the basis of Christ’s sacrifice.

Jesus Christ takes upon Himself every sin of every believer. He bears the everlasting curse for my sin and therefore removes my just condemnation entirely. To illustrate it, think of yourself as hidden in Christ. God’s wrath comes toward you with the almighty power of omnipotent justice, yet you experience

²³¹ Bauer, Danker, Arndt & Gingrich. *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature, Third Edition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 473.

absolutely “*no condemnation*” because you are “*in Christ Jesus*” (Romans 8:1). Jesus Christ has absorbed your everlasting sorrow and torment and terror. He drank every drop from the cup of the grapes of God’s wrath (Matthew 26:39; cf. Revelation 14:10; John 19:30). God therefore erases the record of all my sins in heaven. “[A]s far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us” (Psalm 103:12).

Made Righteous in Christ

Yet, I cannot be just if I am merely neutral, because a state of neutrality is not possible. All people are either God’s enemies or they are at peace with Him. No one has a neutral account. I must have a positive transaction on my account. Therefore Christ transfers His righteousness to my account when I turn from all my rebellion and self-righteousness and turn to God for mercy (this is repentance) believing that Christ is the wrath-bearer for all my sin (this is faith). Christ’s righteousness so far outweighs my debt of sin that God must take an entire chapter to describe “*the blessing of the one to whom God counts righteousness apart from works*” (Romans 4:6). Paul’s conclusion is that righteousness “*will be counted to us who believe in him who raised from the dead Jesus our Lord, who was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification*” (Romans 4:24-25). Helpless man cannot do anything to merit his salvation. Christ must save and Christ alone. What an offence this is to the religions of man.

Man’s religions, centered as they are upon man’s works and merits and will, must, as a result, lack a perfect Savior who can save in and of himself, without the aid of the creature. Their systems, drawing from the nearly universal synergism of

human religiosity, always make room for man's success or failure in "doing things"—whether they be called sacraments, rituals, works, or good deeds—so that the final outcome of salvation is always in doubt."²³²

Yet there is nothing in doubt when we turn to Christ. When He cried, "It is finished," the debt Christ came to pay was finished (John 19:30). You or I can add nothing to it. Christ was finished paying for my sin.

God is Just and the Justifier of the One Who Believes in Jesus

Paul's glorious conclusion about God is that God is "*just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus*" (Romans 3:26). God's purity remains unblemished. God is still holy while allowing sinners into heaven. This is the central point of the Gospel. God is righteous and just in forgiving sinners because of the infinite price that Jesus paid.

Paul's conclusion about man follows: "*For we hold that one is justified by faith apart from works of the law*" (Romans 3:28). In other words, no human being can justify himself by attempting to be "good enough". As soon as we have the capability we begin sinning. We can only be justified through "faith" the infinite sacrifice of Christ to take you're your sin.

Therefore, no one has anything to boast about in himself. Man's boasting about anything good in himself is cancelled out. "*It is excluded*" (verse 27). All the justified sinner can do with every breath that he has is to praise and exalt and lift up the name of Jesus which is above every name and before which every knee shall bow and every tongue confess His divine Lord-

²³² White. *Justification*, 217-18.

ship (cf. Philippians 2:9-11). God is just and sinful man is justified when God gives righteousness to undeserving sinners when they come to Him by faith in the blood of Jesus Christ.

What a message, but how can we turn people from their sin to see the magnificent sacrifice of Christ? Many do not want to hear the message of Christ's payment for sin because the pride of the human race is such that no one thinks he is so sinful that God would have to inhabit human flesh and die in his place. George Whitefield understood this and knew that the means of grace to open sinners hearts was effectual fervent supplication on behalf of guilty, hardened sinners who are in a deadly sleep. They do not see hell awaiting them. How do we wake them up?

How George Whitefield Preached Repentance

The picture that Paris Reidhead paints of George Whitefield presenting the need for biblical repentance to cold hearted sinners is one that will move all Gospel preachers today. Reidhead says:

I'd like to see some people repent on Biblical terms again. George Whitefield knew it. He stood on Boston Commons speaking to twenty thousand people and he said, "Listen sinners, you're monsters, *monsters of iniquity!* You deserve Hell! And the worst of your crimes is that criminals though you've been, you haven't had the good grace to see it!" He said, "If you will not weep for your *sins* and your crimes against a holy God, George Whitefield will weep for you!" That man would put his head back and he would sob like a baby. Why? Because they were in danger of Hell? No! But because they were *monsters of iniquity*, that didn't even see their sin or care about their crimes. You see the difference? You see the difference? The difference is, here's somebody trembling

because he is going to be hurt in Hell. And he has no sense of the enormity of his guilt! And no sense of the enormity of his crime! And no sense of his insult against Deity!

He's only trembling because his skin is about to be singed. He's afraid and I submit to you that where as fear is good office work in preparing us for grace, it's no place to stop. And the Holy Ghost doesn't stop there. That's the reason why no one can savingly receive Christ until they've repented. And no one can repent until they've been convicted. And conviction is the work of the Holy Ghost that helps a sinner to see.

That he is a criminal before God and deserves all of God's wrath. And if God were to send him to the lowest corner of a devil's hell forever and ten eternities, that he deserved it all, and a hundred fold more. Because he has seen his crimes. He's not been convinced he's caught, but he has seen his crimes!²³³

The Word Does the Work

Is there more to do than just to pray and weep for souls? Yes. We must give them the Word of God. Some plant, some water, but God gives the increase (1 Corinthians 3:6). *“So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ”* (Romans 10:17). Faith is not innate in the heart of man (Romans 3:11) but is always generated through a force outside of man, namely, through the Word of God by which man can be *“born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God”* (1 Peter 1:23). Christ's Word does the work of spiritual resurrection, as He said in John 6:63, *“The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life.”*

²³³ Reidhead. “Ten Shekels and a Shirt”.

God's Word is like a hammer. "*Is not my word...like a hammer that breaks the rock in pieces?*" (Jeremiah 23:29). A hammer is used to break rocks into pieces. A hammer itself can do nothing without the hand that uses it. A hammer is used according to the wisdom of the designer. God uses the hammer of His Word to design a regenerated heart in us. "*I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh*" (Ezekiel 36:26). The Word of God, like a hammer breaks the hardest hearts so we can see the need for a Savior. God with His powerful Word breaks us from our former lives as a hammer breaks a rock into pieces.

When a person through the Word of God comes to the place of breaking and desperation he must fly to Jesus. He must not look back at the world as Lot's wife did (Luke 17:32). "*No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God*" (Luke 9:62). If you are without Christ at this moment, run to Jesus, and "*flee from the wrath to come*" (Matthew 3:7). He says, "*Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest*" (Matthew 11:28). He is a merciful Savior. He opens His arms to the broken sinner. "*Behold, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands*" (Isaiah 49:16).

Christ Must Save and Christ Alone

No amount of emotion will save a person. A man's faith will not save him, neither will his repentance. Faith and repentance lead us to Christ. It is Christ who saves. As Augustus Toplady so aptly said:

*Not the labor of my hands
Can fulfill Thy law's demands;
Could my zeal no respite know,*

*Could my tears forever flow,
All for sin could not atone;
Thou must save, and Thou alone.*

Many a sinner has wept in my office after sensing the weight of sin and the condemnation of the Law. A sinner is not saved because they are desperate or miserable. It is this desperation and misery that leads a person to Christ. Yet a person is not born again until Christ lifts the burden of sin from them. This can be known because through faith the love of God is shed abroad in the heart and the joy of sins forgiven is experienced. What “*joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory*”! (1 Peter 1:8).

Conversion Must Occur

When Paul speaks of practical salvation in Ephesians 2, he says that we are “dead in trespasses and sins.” We live as the living dead – with no feeling or responsibility or urgency to serve the living God. Why? Paul explains that we are in slavery to the world, the wicked one, and the whims of our own passions.

The World

The philosophies of the world push us toward atheism at worst or religious moralism at best. The world system, whether religious or atheistic, is godless. A dead legalism or a lawlessness prevails. Religious superstition abounds in any graceless religion with mandates to moralism and legalism like: “pray this sinner’s prayer” (evangelical) or “do penance” (Roman Catholic) or “participate in the liturgy” (Greek Orthodox). On the otherside of the spectrum is a lawlessness

that says “pleasure is everything.” Live in whatever way pleases you most. Like a dead fish, those without the grace of Christ float downstream to their own destruction.

The wicked one

The wicked one is just as enslaving as the current of the world’s philosophies.

The Whims of our Passions

The whims of our passions...

The Line of Demarcation, “But God...”

But God...

A New Nature

You were by nature children awaiting God’s wrath...

God’s Masterpiece

God’s masterpiece...

Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners

When a person sees himself as the “*chief of sinners*” Christ is near and ready to save. John Bunyan said that Christ “did command, that His mercy should be offered to the biggest sinners.”²³⁴ People often think they are too great of sinners to come to Christ, but we must understand that the deeper the sin, the greater the grace Christ has for them. God confronts us with His Law to show what big sinners we are so that He can have

²³⁴ John Bunyan, *Works of John Bunyan*, vol. 1 (Carlisle: Banner of Truth Trust, 1991), 75.

mercy on us! “*Now the law came in to increase the trespass, but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more*” (Romans 5:20). Bunyan went on to say: “I am persuaded, did men believed that there is that grace and willingness in the heart of Christ to save sinners, as the Word imports there is, they would come tumbling into his arms.”²³⁵ “Take therefore encouragement, man”, he says, “mercy is, by the text, held forth to the biggest sinners”.²³⁶ To this we can only sing:

*O the deep, deep love of Jesus,
Vast, unmeasured, boundless, free!
Rolling as a mighty ocean
In its fullness over me!
Underneath me, all around me
Is the current of Thy love
Leading onward, leading homeward
To Thy glorious rest above!*²³⁷

How Ought a Person Come to Christ?

We must ask then, how does a person come to be born again? How ought he come to Christ? A person must come as he is to Jesus Christ. He must not seek to change himself, but simply come believing Christ is his substitute for sin. As Jesus said, the sinner’s need is to be “*born again*” (John 3:3). God draws the sinner through the Word of God, working in his heart to bring about conversion. Therefore, believe what the Word of God says about your helplessness to save yourself. Believe that Jesus Christ died in your place and tasted hell and death for you. As you believe the Word of God and cast your whole heart

²³⁵ Ibid., 78.

²³⁶ Ibid., 89.

²³⁷ “O, the Deep, Deep Love of Jesus” by S. Trevor Francis, 1875.

on Jesus, you will be “*born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God*” (1 Peter 1:23). As far as making oneself ready to come to Christ, there is nothing that the sinner can do to make himself fit. He cannot change himself. He must utterly yield himself to Christ to perform the miracle of the new birth. He must come with nothing but his sins and sorrow and misery. He must come believing that Christ is more than enough to save him. He must stop trying to reform himself and with joy and love and awe run to Jesus. If he tries to make himself better before coming to Christ, he will *never* come because he will *never* be fit. It is just as the glorious hymn says:

*Let not conscience make you linger,
Nor of fitness fondly dream,
All the fitness He requireth
Is to feel your need of Him.*

*Come, ye weary, heavy laden,
Lost and ruined by the fall;
If you tarry till you're better,
You will never come at all.*

*Refrain: I will arise and go to Jesus
He will embrace me in his arms.
In the arms of my dear Saviour
O there are ten thousand charms.²³⁸*

The Invitation

²³⁸ Come Ye Sinners Poor and Needy. Words by Joseph Hart.

To the sinner without Christ I would say this: If you are without Christ, come to Jesus! I do not call you to pray a prayer or to be baptized but to look to Him and be saved. Maybe you realize you do not know Christ. Your life is miserable because you cannot be right in your spirit when you are not right with God. You have looked for pleasures in the world, and they have never satisfied or completely taken away the memory of your guilt. Do not forget about your guilt. Instead, let God deal with it. Christ died for sinners. Come to Christ today. Repent of your sins and put your dependence on Him today. He is mighty to save. Come as you are to Christ.

Charles Spurgeon's Invitation

I would like to close this chapter with several invitations to Christ, the first given by Charles Spurgeon, the great Prince of Preachers:

I hear one say, "Sir, I renounce all trust in good works and ceremonies. Tell me how can I be saved?"

The way is simply this. Our sins deserve punishment; God must and will punish sin; Jesus Christ came into this world and was punished in the room, place, and stead of all that believe on him.

Your business, then, this morning is to make this inquiry, Do I want a Saviour? Do I feel that I want him? And my business, if you answer that question aright is to say, *Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ with all thy heart, and thou shalt be saved.*

...I must lament that there are any of you in a peril so frightful, as to be living without God, without Christ, without a hope of heaven; to have death hanging over you, and yet not to tremble at it. Oh! this morning I beseech you, close with Christ. "Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and ye perish from the way,

while his wrath is kindled but a little: for blessed are all they that put their trust in him.”

John Owen’s Invitation

Who is it that is without Christ? Let him listen to the words of the Puritan John Owen:

Hereon consider the infinite condescension and love of Christ, in His invitations and call of you to come unto Him for life, deliverance, mercy, grace, peace, and eternal salvation. Multitudes of these invitations and calls are recorded in the Scripture and they are all of them filed up with those blessed encouragements which divine wisdom knows to be suited unto lost, convinced sinners, in their present state and condition... Jesus Christ yet stands before sinners, calling, inviting, encouraging them to come unto him.²³⁹

Owen insists that there is nothing—nothing at all—that stops Christ from receiving the sinner at this very moment.

Consider, therefore, His infinite condescension, grace, and love herein. Why all this towards you? Doth He stand in need of you? Have you deserved it at his hands? Did you love Him first? Cannot he be happy and blessed without you? Hath he any design upon you, that he is so earnest in calling you unto him? Alas! It is nothing but the overflowing of mercy, compassion, grace, that moves and acts Him herein... Wherefore, that which is now proposed unto consideration in answer here unto, is the readiness of Christ to receive every sinner, be he who or what he will, that shall come unto Him.²⁴⁰

²³⁹ John Owen. *Works, Volume 1* (Philadelphia: Leighton Publications, 1862), 422.

²⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 422-23.

Jonathan Edwards' Invitation

Finally, I close with the tender invitation of Jonathan Edwards. He speaks especially of those who are in despair over their sin, but who have not yet been born again.

Those who are in trouble and distressing fear, if they come to Jesus Christ, have this to ease them of their fears, that Christ has promised them that He will protect them; that they come upon his invitation; that Christ has plighted his faith for their security if they will close with him; and that he is engaged by covenant to God the Father that he will save those afflicted and distressed souls who come to him.

Christ, by his own free act, has made himself the surety of such, he has voluntarily put himself in their stead; and if justice has any thing against them, he has undertaken to answer for them. By his own act, he has engaged to be responsible for them; so that if they have exposed themselves to God's wrath, and to the stroke of justice, it is not their concern, but his, how to answer or satisfy for what they have done. Let there be never so much wrath that they have deserved, they are as safe as if they never had deserved any; because he has undertaken to stand for them, let it be more or less.²⁴¹

I shall take occasion from what now has been said, to invite those who are afraid of God's wrath, to come to Christ Jesus. You are indeed in a dreadful condition. It is dismal to have God's wrath impending over our heads, and not to know how soon it will fall upon us. And you are in some measure sensible that it is a dreadful condition, you are full of fear and trouble, and you know not where to flee for help; your mind is, as it were, tossed with a tempest. But how lamentable is it, that you

²⁴¹ Jonathan Edwards: *The Works of Jonathan Edwards, Volume 2*, "Safety, Fulness, and Sweet Refreshment in Christ" (Bellingham, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 2008), 930.

should spend your life in such a condition, when Christ would shelter you, as a hen shelters her chickens under her wings, if you were but willing; and that you should live such a fearful, distressed life, when there is so much provision made for your safety in Christ Jesus!

How happy would you be if your hearts were but persuaded to close with Jesus Christ! Then you would be out of all danger: whatever storms and tempests were without, you might rest securely within; you might hear the rushing of the wind, and the thunder roar abroad, while you are safe in this hiding-place. O be persuaded to hide yourself in Christ Jesus! What greater assurance of safety can you desire? He has undertaken to defend and save you, if you will come to him: he looks upon it as his work; he engaged in it before the world was, and he has given his faithful promise which he will not break; and if you will but make your flight there, his life shall be for yours; he will answer for you, you shall have nothing to do but rest quietly in him; you may stand still and see what the Lord will do for you. If there be any thing to suffer, the suffering is Christ's, you will have nothing to suffer; if there be any thing to be done, the doing of it is Christ's, you will have nothing to do but to stand still and behold it.

You will certainly be accepted of the Father if your soul lays hold of Jesus Christ... You need not, therefore, continue in so dangerous a condition; there is help for you. You need not stand out in the storm so long, as there is so good a shelter near you, whose doors are open to receive you. O make haste, therefore, unto that man who is a hiding-place from the wind, and a covert from the tempest!²⁴²

²⁴² Ibid., 931.

May the Lord give all believers the boldness and compassion to preach the Gospel thoroughly and compassionately as those who have gone before us.



Epilogue: We Cannot Afford to Get this Wrong



*“...you hear so much about the carnal Christian...
That’s nonsense. That’s a theology that’s been cre-
ated to account for false professions”*

R.C. SPROUL



*If your religion does not make you holy, it will damn
you as surely as you are now alive. It is
simply painted pageantry to go to hell in.*

CHARLES HADDON SPURGEON²⁴³

The most sobering reality in this entire study is the fact that people's souls hang in the balance. If we do not understand the Gospel rightly, we can very easily give the people we influence a false assurance of heaven and inoculate them from the true message of the Gospel as long as they are under that deception. When Jesus preached the Gospel to Nicodemus He simply told him that he needed a nature change (John 3:3).

Being religious will not gain us entrance into the kingdom of heaven. A person can have great enthusiasm for religious things and still be very lost. From Nicodemus we see that God requires a change of *heart*. Nothing less than a change of the very nature of man will bring a person into the kingdom.

Here was a very religious man, a member of the strictest group among the Jews called the Pharisees. These Pharisees thought they had it right. Here Nicodemus comes to the Messiah with a superficial knowledge, but he was totally without God's light.

We read in John 3, "*Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. This man came to Jesus by night and said to him, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God, for no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with him."* Stop there. What kind of miracles

²⁴³ Charles Spurgeon. *Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit, Volume 46*, Sermon 2674, "Learning in Private What We Teach in Public" (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1900), 290.

was Jesus doing? He was raising the dead. He was healing the blind. He was doing things only God could do—walking on water. Elements were obeying His voice. Remember He was in a storm, and His words as the Master, Creator of Heaven and earth were uttered. He said “*Peace be still*”, and the wind and waves obeyed His voice. The disciples feared, and they said, “*What manner of man is this?*” And the answer is: He’s the God-man. He is almighty God come in human flesh. Now Nicodemus could see that this was the Christ, the Messiah, and yet Nicodemus was still without God. His knowledge was only academic and superficial. His nature was still bound in sin, his eyes still blind.

Now Jesus’ answer to Nicodemus was strange to say the least. In fact Nicodemus did not understand it at all. He said, “*unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God*” (John 3:3). It was as if Jesus was saying ‘*in order to be saved and enter into my kingdom, you need to have a radical change in your heart. It’s not just religious instruction. It’s not just observing and acknowledging what I do. My power must touch your heart. It is a heart thing. You must be born again.*’

The carnal Christian teaching loses sight of the very power of the Gospel. The Gospel humbles the pride of man to the dust. Without that transformation of the heart, the person is not a believer no matter how many times he has said the sinner’s prayer sincerely or how many times he’s been baptized. I fear that a great number in our churches have not experienced the new birth at all. If that is so, then all we are doing each time our churches meet is propping up spiritually dead corpses. There is no worship without spiritual life. What a sober responsibility the Lord’s minister’s have to expose these dead corpses and

prophesy to the wind so that these dry, dead bones might live (Ezekiel 37)!

The damage that can be done by a Christian who does not understand that there is such a thing as a false conversion is devastating. If we lack understanding that those who fail to repent, remain uncovered, we are liable to think that simply praying a sinner's prayer, or responding to an altar call gets someone saved.

R C Sproul sounded the alarm on this so-called “carnal Christian” teaching on James White’s radio program. He said:

You know, you hear so much about the carnal Christian—the person who is really saved, but his life doesn’t change. You can’t find that in the Bible. That’s nonsense. That’s a theology that’s been created to account for false professions.²⁴⁴

False professions are a big problem because modern churches have lost site of the Gospel itself. We need to understand that it is God who must draw and bring the miracle of the new birth. Until that point a person will never come to Christ. We can manipulate a person into praying a prayer, signing a card, or walking an aisle, but we cannot manipulate someone into the kingdom of God.

If we do not expect the Gospel to be the power of God to change the very nature of man, then we very likely may be preaching another Gospel.

Paul Washer drew a line in the sand of conservative Christianity that seriously needed to be drawn. He said:

We do live in an age when the Gospel is seldom preached. Church growth strategies and entertainment are the rule of the

²⁴⁴ RC Sproul appeared on the Dividing Line radio program hosted by Dr. James R. White. He said these words on this program on August 7, 2008.

day. America is not Gospel hardened, but Gospel ignorant, and the ignorance of the masses is the result of the ignorance of preachers. There is a great need to return to Scripture and rediscover the Gospel.²⁴⁵

It is one thing to be wrong about secondary doctrines. We can argue about the timing of end time events or about whether or not God has a plan for national Israel. No one's soul is in danger if we are wrong on those or other secondary areas of theology. But conforming Christians to Christ's image is at the blazing center of God's purpose in saving us. If we take away the only mark by which we identify the new birth (the fruit of holiness) then we are liable to convince a person who has never known Christ that he is a genuine believer when he is not. This is an error we cannot afford to make for the everlasting souls of people hang in the balance. Washer summarizes the serious problem in our churches:

I want you to know that, when you take a look at American Christianity, it is based more upon a godless culture than it is upon the Word of God. And so many people are deceived, and so many youth are deceived, and so many adults are deceived into believing that, because they prayed a prayer one time in their life, they're going to Heaven. And then, when they look around at others who profess to know Christ and see those people also just as worldly as the world, and they compare themselves by themselves, nothing troubles their heart. They think, well, I'm the same as most in my youth group. I watch things I shouldn't watch on television and laugh about the very things that God hates. I wear clothing that is sensual. I talk like

²⁴⁵ Paul Washer. Shocking Youth Message delivered at the 2002 Youth Evangelism Conference in Montgomery, Alabama. Available to read online at: <http://media.sermonaudio.com/mediapdf/52906154239.pdf>.

the world. I walk like the world. I love the music of the world. I love so much that's in the world, but bless God, I am a Christian. Why am I a Christian? I don't look any different than most of the other people in my church. Why am I a Christian? Because there was a time in my life when I prayed and asked Jesus Christ to come into my heart.²⁴⁶

Though he does not name it, he goes on to describe the false teaching of the carnal Christian.

I want you to know that the greatest heresy in the American evangelical and protestant church is that, if you pray and ask Jesus Christ to come into your heart, He will definitely come in. You will not find that in any place in Scripture. You will not find that anywhere in Baptist history until about fifty years ago. What you need to know is that salvation is by faith and faith alone in Jesus Christ. And faith alone in Jesus Christ is preceded and followed by repentance—a turning away from sin, a hatred for the things that God hates and a love for the things that God loves, a growing in holiness and a desire not to be like Britney Spears, not to be like the world, and not to be like the great majority of American Christians, but to be like Jesus Christ!²⁴⁷

My heartcry in this book is that our churches would be filled with genuine Christians who are growing and changing every day to be more like Jesus Christ. It is past time for God's people to discard the dangerous doctrine of antinomianism and preach the life changing Gospel of transformation of heart and life. People's souls are in the balance. We cannot afford to get this wrong.

²⁴⁶ Ibid.

²⁴⁷ Ibid.

Appendix

The Eternal Destiny of Infants, Young Children, and the Men- tally Impaired

When I first came to the church I presently pastor, a dear sister in Christ had asked me a question that most people wonder about, “What happens to a mentally handicapped person when they die?” She had a special friendship with a dear person who was born with a severe case of Downs Syndrome. Her question is a very important one.

Difficult Questions

For that matter, we should also ask further difficult questions. What is the eternal destiny of infants and very young children who do not have the mental capacity to comprehend their accountability to God? How does one account for the fact that a baby is (as my wife puts it) both a “stinker” and very “precious” at the same time? How does the love, mercy, and justice of God come into play with people who are incapable of comprehending any revelation of God whatsoever? If we are all ‘*made sinners*’ because of Adam’s sin, how can babies go to heaven? (Romans 5:19).

These are all serious and important questions. My hope is to uncover what the Word of God teaches. In the end, I believe the Bible gives hope to all parents who have lost babies and little children and to those who have a child or a friend that is mentally handicapped.

All Infants are Participants in Adam’s Fall

I believe God is merciful to babies, little children, and the mentally handicapped, but not because they are innocent. I do believe babies and people born mentally impaired go to heaven when they die, but not because of a sentimental notion that babies are not participants in the Fall. There is no question that all humanity (being in the loins of Adam) participated in Adam’s Fall.

Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned...Therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men. For as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous (Romans 5:12, 18-19).

According to the above verses, all humanity are participants in the Fall of Adam. What sin has an infant committed? The answer is *none* (Romans 9:21). Yet we know that all humans are brought forth through physical birth into sin and have a nature and proneness toward sin.

David states that we all come into the world as sinners: "*Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin my mother conceived me*" (Psalm 51:5, NASB, ESV). The word "*brought forth*" according to the Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament, means, "writhing in labor pains".²⁴⁸ The word "*iniquity*" means "to bend, twist, distort" or "to sin".²⁴⁹ We are all born with a crooked, selfish heart bent away from God. This verse is a good description in the Old Testament as to how we are "*made sinners*" through Adam.

Adam is the federal head of the human race, just as Christ is the Head of the "*one new humanity*", His Body the Church (Ephesians 2:15).²⁵⁰ Adam is the representative of the human race, and his sin is imputed to the human race so that all human beings will die, including some infants, and all in Adam are "*made sinners*" because of his decision to eat of the forbidden fruit (Romans 5:19).

We must be clear that this corruption is not God's work, but it comes through our parents' loins. "[*In Adam all die*" (1 Corinthians 15:22; cf. Hebrews 7:5-10). Ephesians 2:2-3 says that all men are "*sons of disobedience*" and "*by nature the children of wrath...*" We are all born with a nature that leads us

²⁴⁸Harris, R. Laird ; Harris, Robert Laird ; Archer, Gleason Leonard ; Waltke, Bruce K.: *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*. electronic ed. Chicago : Moody Press, 1999, c1980, S. 270

²⁴⁹Ibid.

²⁵⁰ author's translation

astray. *“Folly is bound up in the heart of a child”* (Proverbs 22:15).

David says speaking of the wicked men who were persecuting him: *“The wicked are estranged from the womb; they go astray from birth, speaking lies”* (Psalm 58:3). This verse implies that the nature of people are fallen from their wombs. Matthew Henry says about this verse: “wickedness is bred in the bone with them; they brought it into the world with them; they have in their natures a strong inclination to it; they learned it from their wicked parents, and have been trained up in it by a bad education”.²⁵¹

The Basis of Infant Death: Adam’s Sin

If babies were born innocent or pure or morally neutral, there would be no basis for their death. The very fact that infants die indicates that the sin of Adam has had an effect upon them. *“The wages of sin is death”* (Romans 6:23). *“[T]he soul who sins shall die”* (Ezekiel 18:4). Since an infant has done no sin in and of himself, why does he or she die? It is *“in Adam”* that *“all die”* (1 Corinthians 15:22). If an infant lives, he will, as soon as he is able, sin for himself. In Adam every child has a proneness to sin, has Adam’s sin and sinful nature imputed to him, and will therefore one day most certainly die. Adam’s sin is imputed universally so that it is absolutely certain that ten out of ten people will die. In our inherited sin nature the seeds of death are planted. So we must ask: If babies are not innocent then how does God deal with not only babies, but all persons

²⁵¹ Matthew Henry. *Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the Whole Bible* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1996), Psalm 58:3.

that do not have the mental capacity to comprehend the depth of sin or the person of God?

The Age of Accountability

The Scriptures seem to infer that the judgment of God is based on a person's ability to comprehend their own sin and their accountability to God. For infants and little children, we have come to call this age of comprehension, *the age of accountability*. We know that "to whom much was given, of him much will be required" (Luke 12:48). We learn about sin and God through our conscience, through creation, and directly through the Word of God. If a person has none of these, we have to ask, is he or she accountable? Are babies, little children, and mentally handicapped people held accountable for Adam's sin? Are they held accountable for sin if they do not have the capacity to understand what they are doing?

Only Those With Ability to Comprehend are Without Excuse

Let me say first of all regarding accountability of a child: Scripture is clear that all who have the capacity to comprehend God's creation in nature are certainly without excuse. At what age that occurs, no one knows, but it is through nature we can comprehend the existence of God.

For what can be known about God is plain to them [that is, to mankind], because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse (Romans 1:19-20).

I believe this verse implies that those who cannot comprehend God through the creation because of mental incapability or whose conscience is not yet developed to discern sinful actions are safe. Only those who can have mental capacity are without excuse. All others are safe, even though because of Adam's sin, they sin, yet without full knowledge.

A Baby Has No Works for God to Judge

All people are judged according to their actual works. A baby has committed no sins in the womb, and so he is safe. Romans 9:11 speaks of Jacob and Esau being in the womb "*they were not yet born and had done nothing either good or bad...*" Revelation 20:12 speaks of judgment day. John writes, "*And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened.... And the dead were judged by what was written in the books, according to what they had done*" (cf. 2 Corinthians 5:10; 1 Corinthians 6:9-10). The sin of Adam is not brought out, but they will be judged "*according to their [own] works*". Children in the womb have done no wrong of their own. I believe we can imply that heathen nations from all around the globe who have had stillborn births and miscarriages will have their children in heaven. There will be a multitude without number.

Charles Spurgeon said, "I rejoice to know that the souls of all infants, as soon as they die, speed their way to paradise. Think what a multitude there is of them."²⁵²

Those Without a Developed Conscience are Safe

²⁵² Spurgeon. *Autobiography, Volume 1*, 175.

Those who have no knowledge of good and evil, who do not have a fully developed conscience, will not be held accountable even though they do evil.

And as for your little ones, who you said would become a prey, and your children, who today have no knowledge of good or evil, they shall go in there. And to them I will give it, and they shall possess it. But as for you, turn, and journey into the wilderness in the direction of the Red Sea (Deuteronomy 1:39-40).

These verses imply that the younger a child is, the more he or she lacks knowledge of what is and is not sin. But we must be careful. This verse does not teach that little children do no good or evil. They simply lack knowledge that what they do is sin. These verses imply that infants and little children do not have a fully developed understanding of good and evil and hence lack the capacity to make morally informed and thus responsible choices. At what age are children accountable? The Bible does not say. It is probably different for each child.

The Bible Generally Indicates Infants are Safe

Scripture generally indicates that babies will go to heaven. When David says "*I shall go to him, but he will not return to me*" (2 Samuel 12:23) after the death of his son, what else can he mean? That he will be buried next to his son? No, the joy and confidence that David has in this passage indicate that this baby went to be with God.

In Job 3:16-17, Job says he wishes he were like a stillborn child because they enter into rest. Job wishes he could die and go to heaven. Listen to his words: "*Or why was I not as a hidden stillborn child, as infants who never see the light? There*

the wicked cease from troubling, and there the weary are at rest.”

Conclusion

It is because of these reasons that I believe though children inherit a sinful nature from Adam, I do not believe that children will be judged for Adam's sin.

- (1.) Only those who can have mental capacity are without excuse (Romans 1:19-20).
- (2.) People are judged according to their works. Babies in the womb specifically have no works (Romans 9:11).
- (3.) Those who have no knowledge of good and evil, who do not have a fully developed conscience, will not be held accountable even though they do evil (Deuteronomy 1:39-40).
- (4.) Scripture generally indicates that infants will go to heaven.

Charles Haddon Spurgeon summed it up best:

Among the gross falsehoods which have been uttered against the Calvinist Proper is the wicked calumny [slander] that we hold the damnation of little infants. A baser lie was never uttered. There may have existed somewhere in some corner of the earth, a miscreant [criminal] who would dare to say that there were infants in hell, but I have never met with him, nor have I met with a man who ever saw such a person! We say with regard to infants, Scripture saith but little, and therefore, where Scripture is confessedly scant, it is for no man to determine dogmatically, but I think I speak for the entire body or certainly with exceedingly few exceptions and those unknown to me when I say we hold that all infants who die are elect of God and are therefore saved! We look to this as being

the means by which Christ shall see of the travail of his soul to a great degree and we do sometimes hope that thus the multitude of the saved shall be made to exceed the multitude of the lost.²⁵³

²⁵³ Charles Spurgeon. *Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit, Volume 7*, Sermon 385, “Exposition of the Doctrines of Grace” (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1861), 297.

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