

Thinking on Scripture

A Collection of Theological Essays

Volume 1

Dr. Steven R. Cook

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- Suffering: A Biblical Consideration
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Thinking on Scripture

A Collection of Theological Essays

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
Introduction	1
A Biblical Worldview	3
Essentials of the Christian Faith	9
The Sovereignty of God	15
God's Providence	17
The Hypostatic Union	21
The Work of the Holy Spirit	25
The Filling of the Holy Spirit	31
Illumination and the Doctrine of Election	35
Atonement for Sins	43
The Gospel Message	49
The Raising of the Cross	53
The Doctrine of Soteriology	59
Biblical Humility	65
Love Your Enemies	71
God Loves Israel	75
The Sin of Idolatry	79
The Sin unto Death	83
When God's People Behave Poorly	89
The Doctrine of Simultaneity	93
A Christian View of Death	97
Suffering and Depression	105
The Frailty of Man	111
The House of Mourning	115
I Am a Saint	119
Restoring Broken Fellowship with God	125
An Ambassador for Christ	131
The Christian Priesthood	135
Is Self-Defense Biblical?	141
Wisdom from God	150
Dealing with Fools	159
The Spiritual Christian	167
Walking with God	169

What Does it Mean to be a Man?	173
Wrestling with God	177
You Fight Like you Train	179
Bibliography	183

Introduction

Introduction

Over the years I've written numerous articles on various theological subjects and posted them to my blog: *Thinking on Scripture*. However, I recently decided to put the material into printed format for two reasons: 1) some who read my articles prefer holding a book in their hands and, 2) so the material could be made available to those who do not have access to the internet such as inmates in jail or prison.

Because some of the articles overlap concerning their content (i.e. sin, salvation, Christian living, etc.), there is some repetition of statements and Scripture citations. I actually prefer repetition on certain subjects because it reinforces the material in the reader's mind. It is my prayer that the material in this book brings greater understanding of God's Word and is used by God the Holy Spirit to transform the life of the reader in a godly way.

Dr. Steven R. Cook

Introduction

A Biblical Worldview

A Biblical Worldview

A worldview is a biased perspective on life. It is a mental framework of beliefs that guide our understanding of what is. It's the assumptions we employ to help us make sense of the world, ourselves, and our experiences. Early in life—when our perception of the world is being shaped—we are influenced by the worldviews of family, friends, and surrounding culture. As we grow older, we are confronted with different and opposing worldviews via religious and educational institutions, literature, movies, music and art. At some point in our development—it's different for each person—we choose what we believe and why. Our worldview is important because it's the basis for our values which directs our behavior, relationships, money habits, social and political decisions, and everything we do. A well developed worldview considers the existence of **God** (Person or force?), the **origin of the universe** (intelligent creation or accidental bang?), **human existence** (where we came from and what we are?), **the purpose for life** (do we exist for a reason or by chance?), **human morals** (are values absolute or relative?), **the problem of evil** (is evil real or merely a construct of the mind?), and **the future** (heaven/hell or nothing?). A biblical worldview answers all these concerns. Here are some considerations regarding a biblical worldview:

Faith is at the heart of the biblical worldview. Every worldview operates with some faith assumptions. Even the atheist has faith, most of them believing the universe began with a spontaneous bang and that everything is the product of matter, motion, time and chance. They believe this beyond scientific verification

A Biblical Worldview

(which requires observation and repeatable testing). The materialistic worldview is sometimes found even in children's literature such as the *Berenstain Bears Nature Guide*, which states that nature is "all that is, or was, or ever will be."¹ The Christian worldview operates by faith, and our faith is rooted in Scripture which provides insights into realities we could never know, except that God has spoken. "By faith we understand that the worlds were prepared by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things which are visible" (Heb. 11:3). Developing a comprehensive and consistent biblical worldview takes a lifetime of learning and living (Rom. 12:1-2; 2 Tim. 3:16-17; 1 Pet. 2:2; 2 Pet. 3:18). The final objective of a biblical worldview is love for God, love for others, and submission to the Lordship of Jesus Christ.

The Bible reveals the existence of God (Gen. 1:1) and portrays Him as Creator (Gen. 1:1-2:25). It also reveals His character, what He has done in history, what He is doing now and what He will do in the future. God exists as Trinity (Matt. 28:19; 2 Cor. 13:14; 1 Pet. 1:2): God the Father (Gal. 1:1; Eph. 6:23; Phil. 2:11), God the Son (John 1:1, 14:18; 8:58; 20:28; Col. 2:9; Heb. 1:8), and God the Holy Spirit (Acts 5:3-4; 1 Corinthians 2:11-12; 2 Corinthians 13:14). All three Persons are co-equal, co-infinite, co-eternal, and worthy of all praise and service. The three Persons of the God-head are one in essence (Deut. 6:4; Isa. 43:10; 44:6-8; 45:5, 18), sharing the exact same attributes.

¹ Stan and Jan Berenstain, *The Bears' Nature Guide* (New York, NY, Random House, 1975), 6.

A Biblical Worldview

God created the universe in six literal days (Gen. 1-2; Ex. 20:8-11). From Scripture we understand God created the universe and all the creatures in it (Gen. 1-2; Heb. 11:3). The creation glorifies God by being and doing what He intended (Ps. 19:1-2). God created an open universe in which He continually operates in every detail, involving Himself in people's lives, directing history for His glory. The Lord assigns value and purpose to all His creation, whether rock or flower, wind or rain, light or darkness, cat or dog, etc. From the biblical perspective I perceive my little Havanese as a part of God's creation, having design and purpose because God created her to be what she is. I know "a righteous man has regard for the life of his animal" (Pro 12:10); therefore, I feel responsible to care for my little dog. "The character of a man is seen in the way he treats those under his care or at his mercy, even when they are animals. This verse demonstrates that we are responsible to have dominion over the animals, while doing so in a way that reflects the tenderness of our Creator (Ps. 104:14, 27; 145:16; 147:8-9)."²

God created mankind in His image, to think, feel and act (Gen. 1:26-27). God also created mankind for a purpose, to have a relationship with Him and other people, and to exercise responsible dominion over His creation, caring for plants and animals (Gen. 1:26-30; cf. Deut. 25:4; Prov. 12:10). As God's unique creatures we find ourselves naturally bent toward art, music, literature, philosophy, science, mathematics,

² John A. Kitchen, *Proverbs: A Mentor Commentary* (Scotland, Great Britain, Christian Focus Publications, 2006), 267.

A Biblical Worldview

architecture, sports, and other activities that enrich the soul and glorify the Lord. The Christian can engage in art and science to the glory of God, as this is consistent with Scripture. As Christians living in God's world, and understanding what the Scripture teaches about His creation, we are able to make sense of the world around us and enjoy the creation as God intended. Knowing Scripture also allows us to understand and reject the sinful perversions of the arts and sciences that fallen men have corrupted. Without God and Scripture to guide and give man purpose, man's uniqueness is lost in the universe, as he is ultimately of no greater value than what he paints on the canvass or studies under the microscope. Biblical thinkers know this to be true; because if there is no God and man is not unique (as the Bible teaches), then he is of no greater value than the tree, the rock, or the worm on a hook. If there is no God, then man is a zero. When he dies, his biological life is consumed by the material universe from which he came. Consider this view of death by the atheist John Updike:

Without warning, David was visited by an exact vision of death: a long hole in the ground, no wider than your body, down which you were drawn while the white faces above recede. You try to reach them but your arms are pinned. Shovels pour dirt in your face. There you will be forever, in an upright position, blind and silent, and in time no one will remember you, and you will never be called by any angel. As strata of rock shift, your fingers elongate, and your teeth are distended sideways in a great underground grimace indistinguishable from a strip of chalk. And the earth tumbles on, and the sun

A Biblical Worldview

expires, an unaltering darkness reigns where once there were stars.³

God is the absolute standard for right and wrong, and He expects mankind to conform to that which He has revealed about Himself in Scripture (Ps. 11:7; 34:15-16; Lam. 1:18; Dan. 9:14; Hos. 14:9; Zep. 3:4). If there is no God, and no written revelation of His character and will, then men are left only with their conflicting opinions and there is no final arbiter to determine what is right or what is wrong. However, God has spoken in the Bible, and what He says about men and their actions is the final basis for correct thinking concerning morals and behavior.

Evil exists in connection with the willful creatures who produce it. Evil first came into existence in the angelic realm when Lucifer rebelled against God (Isa. 14:12-14; Ezek. 28:12-18). Adam and Eve introduced sin and evil into the human realm when they followed Satan and rebelled against God (Gen. 2:16-17; 3:1-7). All humanity is corrupt in Adam, inclined toward sin, spiritually dead and powerless to change their spiritually fallen condition (Rom. 3:23; 5:6-12; 1 Cor. 15:21-22). God alone corrects the problem of sin and evil through the cross of Christ. Evil will come to an end in the eternal state when God destroys the current heavens and earth and creates a new heavens and earth where righteousness dwells (2 Pet. 3:13; Rev. 20:10-15; 21-22).

³ John Updike, *Pigeon Feathers* (New York, NY, Random House Publishers, 1975), 17.

A Biblical Worldview

God is actively involved in the affairs of mankind. God has an agenda, a plan He formed before the creation of the world, and He is currently executing that plan according to His sovereign will and for His own glory (Ps. 33:11; Isa. 14:24; 25:1; 46:9-11). Within God's plan, He extends hope for the lost. The Bible reveals God's plan of salvation through His Son, Jesus Christ, who took upon Himself true humanity (Gen. 3:15; John 1:1, 14), born of a virgin (Isa. 7:14; Matt. 1:18-25), lived righteously according to the Mosaic Law (Matt. 5:17-19; Gal. 4:4), never sinned (Heb. 4:15), died a substitutionary death on a cross (Mark 10:45; Rom. 5:8), was buried and rose to life on the third day (1 Cor. 15:3-4), and ascended to heaven where He is currently interceding for the saints (Acts 1:10-11; Rom. 8:34). Salvation is a gracious and free gift to all who will accept it by faith alone in Christ alone (John 3:16; 1 Cor. 15:3-4; Gal. 2:16; Eph. 2:8-9; Phil. 3:9; Tit. 3:5).

Jesus Christ will return again to rule the earth (Rev. 19:11-16; 20:1-6). There is a future hope for those who trust Christ as Savior and look forward to His return in which He suppresses all sinful rebellion and establishes His reign on the earth. This will be a time of righteousness and goodness for all those under Christ's rule (2 Pet. 3:13; Rev. 20:1-6).

In summary, the biblical worldview considers the major issues of life and provides the most comprehensive answer for what is. We should not think of the biblical worldview as merely an academic exercise to answer our burning questions. No. There is real life application for the biblical worldview, which should produce in us a love and appreciation for God, love for others, and submission to the Lordship of Jesus Christ.

Essentials of the Christian Faith

The Bible - Scripture is God's inerrant and enduring written revelation that tells us who He is and what He's accomplished in time and space. The Bible does not reveal all there is to know about God or His plans and actions, but only what He deems important (Deut. 29:29). Scripture was written by approximately forty human authors spanning nearly fifteen hundred years. The human authors—without forfeiting their personal literary style—wrote under the direction and superintending care of God the Holy Spirit (Ex. 17:14; 34:27; Isa. 30:8; Jer. 30:2; Luke 1:3; 1 Cor. 14:37; Rev. 1:11), so that what is written is the inerrant and infallible “word of God” (1 Thess. 2:13; cf. Ps. 12:6-7; Rom. 15:4; 2 Tim. 3:16-17; 2 Pet. 1:20). Some of the various literary styles include historical narrative, law, poetry, psalms, proverbs, parables, and symbolism. Nearly one fourth of Scripture was/is prophecy. The Bible is written in propositional terms and understood and accepted by those whom the Holy Spirit illumines (1 Cor. 2:14-16; 2 Cor. 3:14-16; 4:3-4). Our spiritual sanctification depends on Scripture (John 17:17; 1 Pet. 2:2; 2 Pet. 3:18). Christians do not worship the Bible, but neither can we worship God without it (John 4:24).

The Trinity - There is one God who exists as three distinct Persons within the Trinity (Matt. 28:19; 2 Cor. 13:14; 1 Pet. 1:2): God the Father (Gal. 1:1; Eph. 6:23; Phil. 2:11), God the Son (John 1:1, 8:58; 14:18; 20:28; Col. 2:9; Heb. 1:8), and God the Holy Spirit (Acts 5:3-4; 1 Cor. 2:11-12; 2 Cor. 13:14). All three are co-equal, co-infinite, co-eternal, and worthy of all praise and service. The three Persons of the God-head are one in essence (Deut. 6:4; Isa.

Essentials of the Christian Faith

43:10; 44:6-8; 45:5, 18). God is *all-knowing* (Ps. 139:1-6; Matt. 6:31-33), *all-present* (Ps. 139:7-12; Heb. 13:5), *all-powerful* (Job 42:2; Isa. 40:28-29), *sovereign* (1 Chron. 29:11; Dan. 4:35; Acts 17:24-25), *righteous* (Ps. 11:7; 119:137), *just* (Ps. 9:7-8; 19:9; 50:6; 58:11), *holy* (Ps. 99:9), *immutable* (Ps. 102:26, 27; Mal. 3:6), *truthful* (2 Sam. 7:28; John 17:17; 1 John 5:20), *loving* (Jer. 31:3; 1 John 4:7-12, 16), *faithful* (Deut. 7:9; Lam. 3:23; 1 John 1:9), *merciful* (Ps. 86:15; Luke 6:36; Tit. 3:5), *gracious* (Ps. 111:4; 116:5; 1 Pet. 5:10), and *eternal* (Deut. 33:27; 1 Tim. 1:17).

The Deity/Humanity of Jesus - At a point in time, the eternal Son of God added humanity to Himself, simultaneously being God and man, Creator and creature, theanthropic (John 1:1, 14:18; 8:58; 20:28; Col. 2:9; Heb. 1:8). Jesus is the God-man (John 1:1, 14). Jesus exists in *hypostatic union*, as a single Person with a divine and human nature (John 1:1, 14; 1 John 4:2-3), both natures being distinct and preserved, not mixed or confused, fully God and fully man. The *hypostatic union* is forever, from conception onward. Jesus was supernaturally conceived by the Holy Spirit in the womb of the virgin Mary (*parthenogenesis* – Isaiah 7:14; Matthew 1:23; Luke 1:26-38), who is the mother of Jesus' humanity (*christotokos* – bearer of Christ). Jesus was born a son of Abraham, in the line David (Matt. 1:1), without a human father and without sin (2 Cor. 5:21; Heb. 4:15; 1 Pet. 2:22; 1 John 3:5). The baby Jesus grew in wisdom (Luke 2:40, 52), and lived a sinless and righteous life before God and man. In His humanity, Jesus walked in perfect conformity to God the Father's holy character and divine revelation.

Essentials of the Christian Faith

Substitutionary Atonement – God the Son became man that He might redeem fallen humanity from sin and death (Mark 10:45). The Bible reveals, “In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace” (Eph. 1:7; cf. Col. 1:13-14; 1 Pet. 1:18-19). In Jerusalem, on April 3, A.D. 33, Jesus willingly laid down His life and died a substitutionary atoning death on a cross (John 3:16; 10:11, 17-18). He died a death He did not deserve, “*the* just for *the* unjust, so that He might bring us to God” (1 Pet. 3:18). Jesus’ death forever satisfied every righteous demand God had toward our sin (Rom. 3:24-25; Heb. 10:10-14; 1 John 2:2; 4:10), and is the basis for forgiveness and reconciliation to God (Rom. 5:1-2; 2 Cor. 5:21; Eph. 1:7; Col. 1:13-14; 20-22). Christ died for the sins of everyone (Heb. 2:9; 1 John 2:2; 4:10), but only those who trust Jesus as their Savior will know eternal life (John 3:16, 20:31). Salvation is never accomplished by what a person does for God, but rather, what God has accomplished for him through the Person and work of Jesus Christ who died for his sins (John 3:16), and gives him eternal life and righteousness (John 10:28; Phil. 3:9).

The Bodily Resurrection, Ascension, and Return of Jesus – After His death on the cross, Jesus was buried and resurrected bodily on the third day (Matt. 20:18-19; Acts 10:39-41; 1 Cor. 15:3-4, 20), never to die again (Rom. 5:9). After forty days, Jesus ascended bodily to heaven (Acts 1:3-10), with a promise of a physical return (Acts 1:9-11). The rapture of the church—which precedes Jesus’ Second Coming—is the next prophetic event to occur in history (1 Thess. 4:13-18; Tit. 2:13). The rapture of the church is a world-changing event in which the bodies of deceased Christians are resurrected (1 Thess. 4:13-18) and

Essentials of the Christian Faith

the bodies of living Christians are transformed and removed from the world (1 Cor. 15:51-52; 1 Thess. 4:17), meeting the Lord in the air and going to heaven to be with God forever (John 14:1-3). The rapture will be followed by seven years of worldwide tribulation (Dan. 9:24-27; Matt. 24-25; Rev. 6-20), culminating in the triumphal return of Jesus as the King of kings, and Lord of lords (Rev. 19:11-16). After His second coming, Jesus will judge the nations of the world (Matt. 25:31-46), and establish a future reign in righteousness in Jerusalem, on the throne of David (2 Sam. 7:12, 16; Ps. 89:36-37; Isa. 9:6-7; Luke 1:31-33; Rev. 20:1-6). After His reign, Jesus will judge all unbelievers (Rev. 20:11-15), and then make a “new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells” (2 Pet. 3:13; cf. Rev. 21-22).

Salvation by Grace alone, through Faith alone, in Christ alone - Jesus is the only Savior for mankind, for “there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved” (Act 4:12). God’s provision of salvation from eternal death was paid in full by the Lord Jesus Christ who willingly shed His blood and died on a cross, atoning for every human sin. Because of sin, every person is spiritually dead and powerless to change their situation (Rom. 5:6-10; Eph. 2:1-3). Good works have no saving merit (Isa. 64:6; Gal. 2:16; Eph. 2:8-9; Tit. 3:5). Salvation is offered to helpless, ungodly, sinners (John 3:16-18; Rom. 5:6-10; Eph. 2:1-2; 8-9), and is received by grace alone (Rom. 4:1-5; Eph. 2:8-9), through faith alone (Gal. 2:16; 3:26; Eph. 2:8-9; Tit. 3:5), in Christ alone (John 14:6; Acts 4:12; 1 Corinthians 15:1-4). Salvation is “the gift of God” (Eph. 2:8), and is “according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy

Essentials of the Christian Faith

Spirit” (Tit. 3:5). God has prepared good works to follow our salvation (Eph. 2:10), but they are never the condition of it (Acts 16:30-31; Eph. 2:8-9; 2 Tim. 1:9; Tit. 3:5). The matter is simple: Salvation only comes to those who believe in Christ as their Savior (John 3:16; 20:31; Acts 16:30-31).

Essentials of the Christian Faith

The Sovereignty of God

The Sovereignty of God

God is the sovereign Creator-Lord of the universe (Gen. 1:1; Ps. 115:3; 135:6; Dan. 4:35). He is infinitely good, and all good things were created by Him, for Him, and to His glory. From Genesis to Revelation, God governs the lives of people and nations. People exist because God gives them life. David writes, “Know that the LORD Himself is God; it is He who has made us, and not we ourselves” (Ps. 100:3). He determines the duration of each person’s life, having final control over the day and cause of a person’s death. It is written, “in Your book were all written the days that were ordained *for me*, when as yet there was not one of them” (Ps. 139:16). And Hannah, in her stately prayer says, “The LORD kills and makes alive; He brings down to Sheol and raises up” (1 Sam. 2:6). People live and die as God decides, “for in Him we live and move and exist” (Acts 17:28). God controls when and where people will live in history, for “He made from one *man* every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined *their* appointed times and the boundaries of their habitation” (Acts 17:26). Even the great rulers of this world exist because of His plan, for “It is He who changes the times and the seasons; He removes kings and establishes kings; He gives wisdom to wise men and knowledge to men of understanding” (Dan. 2:21). God has power over wealth and poverty, for “The LORD makes poor and rich; He brings low, He also exalts” (1 Sam. 2:7). The Lord is supreme over all His creation, “Whatever the LORD pleases, He does, in heaven and in earth, in the seas and in all deeps” (Ps. 135:6). There is no one who can understand all His ways, or stop what He has set in motion. “All the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing,

The Sovereignty of God

but He does according to His will in the host of heaven and *among* the inhabitants of earth; and no one can ward off His hand or say to Him, ‘What have You done?’” (Dan 4:35). God allows fallen angels and humans to produce sin and evil, but they never act beyond or against His sovereign will (Job 1:1-21; Ps. 105:12-15; 1 Kings 22:19-23; 2 Cor. 12:7-10). God’s sovereignty over all creation is a prevailing theme throughout all of Scripture. God has many attributes, but His sovereignty is foremost. The Bible reveals God is righteous and just, truthful and loving, merciful and gracious, and the humble boast that they know Him (Jer. 9:23-24).

God's Providence

God's Providence

God's *providence* refers to His wise and personal acts, whereby He creates and controls circumstances in order to direct history according to His predetermined plan, all for His glory and the benefit of His elect. People live in the flow of history, and are moved by the circumstances God controls. The Lord "does according to His will in the host of heaven and *among* the inhabitants of earth; and no one can ward off His hand or say to Him, 'What have You done?'" (Dan 4:35). God is good and "works all things after the counsel of His will" (Eph. 1:11; cf. Ps. 103:19; 135:6; Dan. 4:35), and "causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to *His* purpose" (Rom 8:28). By His sovereign will God created all things in heaven and earth, and sustains and directs them as He desires. God "is before all things, and in Him all things hold together" (Col. 1:17). The Lord knows all things at all times. He knows when a sparrow falls to the ground (Matt. 10:29), and the ever-changing number of hairs on our head (Matt. 10:30). He knows our thoughts before we think them (Ps. 139:2), and our words before we speak them (Ps. 139:4). He knows our wickedness (Jer. 17:9; Mark 7:21-22), and chooses to love us by grace, in spite of our sinfulness (Matt. 5:45; Rom. 5:6-10; Eph. 2:1-9). Some He elects to purpose, even from the womb (Jer. 1:5; Gal. 1:15). Because God is righteous, all His actions are just. Because He is loving and good, He directs all things for the benefit of His elect. The wicked are also under God's sovereign control, and He uses them for His own ends (Prov. 16:4). "To be sure, evil

God's Providence

has entered the universe, but it is not allowed to thwart God's original, benevolent, wise, and holy purpose."¹

Providence is normally defined in Christian theology as the unceasing activity of the Creator whereby, in overflowing bounty and goodwill (Ps. 145:9 *cf.* Mt. 5:45–48), he upholds his creatures in ordered existence (Acts 17:28; Col. 1:17; Heb. 1:3), guides and governs all events, circumstances and free acts of angels and men (*cf.* Ps. 107; Jb. 1:12; 2:6; Gn. 45:5–8), and directs everything to its appointed goal, for his own glory (*cf.* Eph. 1:9–12). This view of God's relation to the world must be distinguished from: (a) *pantheism*, which absorbs the world into God; (b) *deism*, which cuts it off from him; (c) *dualism*, which divides control of it between God and another power; (d) *indeterminism*, which holds that it is under no control at all; (e) *determinism*, which posits a control of a kind that destroys man's moral responsibility; (f) the doctrine of *chance*, which denies the controlling power to be rational; and (g) the doctrine of *fate*, which denies it to be benevolent.²

God's providence is seen throughout the Bible. God brought Joseph to Egypt, by the evil actions of his

¹ Henry Clarence Thiessen and Vernon D. Doerksen, *Lectures in Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1979), 122.

² J. I. Packer, "Providence" in *New Bible Dictionary*, ed. D. R. W. Wood, I. H. Marshall, A. R. Millard and D. J. Wiseman, 3rd ed. (Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 979-80.

God's Providence

brothers (Gen. 37:23-28), and later used Joseph to deliver the very ones who betrayed him (Gen. 45:5-8; 47:11, 27-28; 50:20). This was done to fulfill a promise given to Abraham (Gen. 15:13; 47:11, 27-28). It was God's providence that drove Saul to chase after his father's donkeys, and then be led to the prophet Samuel and anointed king of Israel (1 Sam. 9-10). It was God's providence that directed Joseph and Mary to Bethlehem, so the baby Jesus would be born at the appointed time and place (Mic. 5:2; Luke 2:4-6; Gal. 4:4). Later, Joseph and Mary were compelled to go to Egypt, in order to preserve the baby Savior (Matt. 2:13-15). It was God's providence that forced Aquila and Priscilla out of Rome by the emperor Claudius' decree, only to meet the apostle Paul in Corinth and join him in Christian ministry (Acts 18:1-3; Rom. 16:3; 1 Cor. 16:19). It was God's providence that put the Lord Jesus on the cross to be crucified by the hands of godless men (Acts 2:23; 4:27-28). Jesus died a substitutionary death, even for those who crucified Him (Rom. 3:25; 1 Cor. 15:3-4; 1 John 2:2; 4:10).

God's sovereignty, expressed through His providential control, produces confidence in those who know He is directing all things after the counsel of His will. The growing believer knows "it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure" (Phil. 2:13). Where the Bible is silent, the believer seeks to discern God's will through His providential direction as He directs people and circumstances as He pleases. God controls all of life (Gen. 2:17; Job. 1:21; Ps. 104:29-30; Eccl. 12:7; Dan. 5:23), human birth and calling (Ps. 139:13-16; Jer. 1:4-5; Gal. 1:15), nature (Ps. 147:8; Jonah 1:4; Mark 4:39-41), plagues (Ex. 7-11; 12:29; Rev. 16:10-11), the roll of dice (Prov. 16:33; cf. Ps. 22:18; Matt.

God's Providence

27:35), health and sickness (Deut. 28:27-30; 2 Chron. 21:18; Ps. 41:3; Acts 3:16), prosperity and adversity (1 Sam. 2:7; Job 2:10; Isa. 45:5-7), suffering (Ps. 119:71; Heb. 12:5-11), and the development of Christian character (Rom. 5:2-5; 2 Cor. 12:7-10; Jam. 1:2-4). The growing believer takes great delight in knowing his good, loving and wise God is in control of His creation and is directing all things according to His providential plan.

The Hypostatic Union

The Hypostatic Union

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God...And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth. (John 1:1, 14)

John uses simple words to reveal profound truth...“And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us” (John 1:14a). At a point in time, God the Son added to Himself humanity, forever uniting His divine nature with a perfect sinless human nature, becoming the God-man. In the field of systematic theology, *this is called the hypostatic union*. “Though His deity is eternal, the humanity was gained in time. Therefore, the theanthropic Person—destined to be such forever—began with the incarnation.”¹ God the Son did not indwell a human, but forever added humanity to Himself. “When Christ came, a Person came, not just a nature; He took on an additional nature, a human nature—He did not simply dwell in a human person. The result of the union of the two natures is the theanthropic Person (the God-man).”² Reading through the Gospels, there were times that Jesus operated from His divine nature (Mark 2:5-12; John 8:56-58; 10:30-33), and other times from His human nature (Matt. 4:2; Luke 8:22-23; John 19:28). Concerning both natures, Paul Enns writes:

¹ Lewis S. Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, Vol. 1 (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Kregel Publications, 1993), 383.

² Paul P. Enns, *Moody Handbook of Theology*, (Chicago, Illinois: Moody Press, 1989), 227.

The Hypostatic Union

The two natures of Christ are inseparably united without mixture or loss of separate identity. He remains forever the God-man, fully God and fully man, two distinct natures in one Person forever. Though Christ sometimes operated in the sphere of His humanity and in other cases in the sphere of His deity, in all cases what He did and what He was could be attributed to His one Person. Even though it is evident that there were two natures in Christ, He is never considered a dual personality. In summarizing the hypostatic union, three facts are noted: (1) Christ has two distinct natures: humanity and deity; (2) there is no mixture or intermingling of the two natures; (3) although He has two natures, Christ is one Person.³

Jesus is the God-Man. He is eternal God (Isa. 9:6; John 8:56-58), yet He was born of a woman in time and space (Gal. 4:4). He is omniscient (Ps. 139:1-6), but as a boy, He grew in knowledge (Luke 2:52). He created the universe (Gen. 1:1; John 1:3; Col. 1:15-16), but as man, He is subject to its weaknesses (Matt. 4:2; John 19:28). Concerning the complexity of the union, Lewis S. Chafer states:

The reality in which undiminished Deity and unfallen humanity united in one Theanthropic Person has no parallel in the universe. It need not be a matter of surprise if from the contemplation of such a Being problems arise which human

³ Ibid., 225.

The Hypostatic Union

competency cannot solve; nor should it be a matter of wonder that, since the Bible presents no systematized Christology but rather offers a simple narrative with its attending issues, that the momentous challenge to human thought and investigation which the Christ is, has been the major issue in theological controversy from the beginning to the present time.⁴

We struggle to comprehend the union of God and Man; however, it is with certainty that the Bible portrays Him this way (John 1:1, 14; 20:28; cf. Luke 1:31-33; 2 Cor. 5:21; Heb. 4:15), and this truth is essential to Christianity. As God, Jesus is worthy of all worship and praise (Luke 24:51-52; John 9:38; 20:28; Heb. 1:6). As a perfect sinless Man, He went to the cross and died a substitutionary death in my place (Mark 10:45; Rom. 5:6-10; 1 Cor. 15:3-4; 1 Pet. 3:18), and bore the wrath of God that rightfully belonged to me (Isa. 53:1-12), so that I might have the gifts of righteousness and eternal life (John 3:16; 10:28; 2 Cor. 5:21; Phil. 3:9). What a blessing my Savior is to me.

⁴ Lewis S. Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, Vol. 1, 387.

The Hypostatic Union

The Work of the Holy Spirit

The Work of the Holy Spirit

The dynamic of the believer's spiritual walk is predicated to a certain degree on how much Bible knowledge resides in his soul. He cannot live what he does not know, and knowing God's word necessarily precedes living His will. Knowing God's word does not guarantee a spiritual walk, as the believer may follow the world rather than the Holy Spirit (Jas. 4:17; 1 Jo. 2:15). However, he cannot be spiritual without some knowledge of Scripture, and the more he knows, the more he's able to surrender his life to God.

Understanding the work of Holy Spirit in the dispensation of Grace enables the believer to live the spiritual life. The Mosaic Law system is not the rule of life for the church age believer, and sadly, too many Christians seek to live by it. How the Holy Spirit worked in the life of saints under the Mosaic Law is vastly different than how He works in the life of the believer today. For example, under the dispensation of the Mosaic Law the Holy Spirit indwelt and empowered only a few believers such as **Artisans** (Ex. 31:1-5), **Judges** (Num. 11:25-29; Jud. 3:9-10), **Prophets** (Ezek. 2:2), and **Kings** (1 Sam. 10:6; 16:13); however, in the dispensation of Grace, every believer in the church is indwelt by Him (John 14:16-17; Romans 5:5; 8:9; 1 Cor. 6:19). Also, under the dispensation of the Mosaic Law, the Holy Spirit could be taken from a believer as an act of discipline (1 Sam. 16:14-16), but this cannot happen to the believer under the dispensation of Grace, as the Christian is permanently sealed with the Holy Spirit Himself (Eph. 1:13-14; 4:30). Under the previous dispensation David could petition the Lord and ask Him not

The Work of the Holy Spirit

to “take Thy Holy Spirit from me” (Ps. 51:11); but no church age believer should pray such a prayer, since the Holy Spirit does not leave when sin is produced. The sinning Christian may “grieve” and/or “quench” the Holy Spirit when sin is accomplished, and this he is commanded not to do (Eph. 4:30; 1 Thess. 5:19); but the disobedient Christian does not live under threat of losing the Holy Spirit if he fails to yield to the will of God. Certainly the Lord can and does discipline the erring child (Heb. 12:6), but not with the removal of the Holy Spirit, as was true in the OT.

Jesus communicated these differences regarding the work of the Holy Spirit and prophesied that after His resurrection the Holy Spirit would be given to all believers to indwell them (Jo. 7:37-39; 14:16-17, 26; 16:13; Acts 1:5; 2:1-4). An important note to observe is the fact that Jesus referred to the coming ministry of the Holy Spirit as future from His resurrection (Acts 1:5; 2:1-4). This shows that what the Holy Spirit is doing in the Church age is distinct from what He did in the lives of some of the saints in the previous dispensation. The Holy Spirit is working in the lives of two groups of people: unbelievers and believers. Regarding unbelievers and the world it is stated that He is:

1. Convicting unbelievers of “sin, righteousness, and judgment” (John 16:8-11).
2. Restraining sin in the world (2 Thess. 2:7).

The Christian operating on the authority of Scripture knows the Holy Spirit is working in the heart of the unbeliever to convince him of “sin, righteousness, and judgment.” This convincing work of the Spirit regarding Christ, His work, and future judgment may be suppressed

The Work of the Holy Spirit

by the unbeliever—like other forms of God’s revelation—but it cannot be stopped. It is not the Christian’s place to convince the unsaved person about Christ’s Person and work, but simply to present the facts of Scripture and trust the Holy Spirit to illumine and persuade. Failure to understand what the Holy Spirit is doing in the lives of unbelievers may lead an ignorant believer to assume the Holy Spirit’s convicting work, and this results in frustration since the Christian is in no way equipped or commanded to tackle this momentous task.

It is reported in Scripture that the Holy Spirit is now restraining sin in the world until the Church is taken to heaven at the Rapture (2 Thess. 2:7; cf. 1 Thess. 4:13-18). The terrible darkness that will consume the world when the restraining work of the Holy Spirit ends is manifest in the lives of those living during the time of the seven year Tribulation (Rev. 6-19; cf. 2 Thess. 2:3-12). It is obvious that there is much sin in the world now, and it staggers the imagination to try to comprehend how bad it will be after the Holy Spirit’s restraining ministry ends.

Once a person believes in Jesus for salvation, he is then delivered “from the domain of darkness, and transferred...to the kingdom of His beloved Son” (Col. 1:13). This transference is instantaneous and permanent, and is understood as the work of the Holy Spirit **at salvation**. Once saved, the Holy Spirit permanently indwells the Christian (1 Cor. 6:19; Eph. 1:13-14), makes him a “new creature” in Christ Jesus (1 Cor. 5:17), and gives him the spiritual capacity to live righteously (Rom. 6:11-14). The Holy Spirit then works to form the character of Christ in him, which is understood as the work of the Holy Spirit **after salvation**. Some of the works of the Holy

The Work of the Holy Spirit

Spirit in the life of the believer are as follows:

At salvation:

1. Regeneration (John 3:6; 2 Cor. 5:17; Col. 2:13).
2. Indwelling each believer (John 14:16-17; Rom. 5:5; 8:9; 1 Cor. 6:19).
3. Baptizing into union with Christ (1 Cor. 12:13; Gal. 3:27).
4. Sealing each believer with Himself (Eph. 4:30).
5. Providing eternal life (John 3:16).
6. Imputing Christ's righteousness (2 Cor. 5:21; Phil. 3:9).
7. Blessing with every spiritual blessing (Eph. 1:3).
8. Providing a spiritual gift for the edification of the church (1 Cor. 12:4-7).

After salvation:

1. Glorifying Jesus in the believer's life (John 16:14).
2. Teaching directly through the Word and gifted speakers (John 16:13-15; Eph. 4:11-16).
3. Recalling Scripture to mind (John 14:26; 16:13).
4. Filling (empowering and guiding) (Eph. 5:18).
5. Sustaining spiritual walk (Gal. 5:16, 25).
6. Illuminating the mind and making Scripture understandable (1 Cor. 2:11-13).
7. Promoting the use of the believer's spiritual gift (Rom. 12:6-8; 1 Cor. 12:4-10, 28-30; Eph. 4:11).

The works of the Holy Spirit **at salvation** are once for all, and occur immediately when faith is placed in Jesus as Savior. In contrast, the works of the Holy Spirit **after salvation** are regularly repeated in the believer's life, and

The Work of the Holy Spirit

require a volitional response to the Spirit's leading. The Holy Spirit seeks to guide the believer into God's will, but does not force compliance. The above lists of the ministry of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer are not exhaustive, but are representative of the major aspects of His work.

The Work of the Holy Spirit

The Filling of the Holy Spirit

The Filling of the Holy Spirit

The Holy Spirit fills us to accomplish His will (Eph. 5:18). The filling of the Holy Spirit simply means He controls, influences or directs us as we yield to Him and are willing to accomplish His will according to Scripture.

And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit. (Eph. 5:18)

When a person consumes alcohol and gets drunk, eventually it influences his thinking, words, and behavior in an obvious and negative manner. The Bible does not condemn drinking wine, but it does condemn drunkenness, in which the believer loses control of himself. Drunkenness is sin. In contrast to being drunk, the Bible commands the believer to “be filled with the Spirit.”

“Be filled with the Spirit” is God’s command, and He expects us to obey. The command is plural, so it applies to all Christians and not just to a select few. The verb is in the present tense—“keep on being filled”—so it is an experience we should enjoy constantly and not just on special occasions. And the verb is passive. We do not fill ourselves but permit the Spirit to fill us. The verb “fill” has nothing to do with contents or quantity, as though we are empty vessels that need a required amount of spiritual fuel to keep going. In the Bible, *filled* means “controlled by.” “They... were filled with wrath” (Luke 4:28) means “they were controlled by wrath” and for that reason tried to kill Jesus. “The Jews were filled with envy” (Acts 13:45) means that

The Filling of the Holy Spirit

the Jews were controlled by envy and opposed the ministry of Paul and Barnabas. To be “filled with the Spirit” means to be constantly controlled by the Spirit in our mind, emotions, and will...But how can a person tell whether or not he is filled with the Spirit? Paul stated that there are three evidences of the fullness of the Spirit in the life of the believer: he is *joyful* (Eph. 5:19), *thankful* (Eph. 5:20), and *submissive* (Eph. 5:21–33). Paul said nothing about miracles or tongues, or other special manifestations.¹

As a Christian, I don’t ask the Spirit to fill me, as that’s what He already wants to do; rather, I submit to God and walk in the light of Scripture and trust the Spirit to guide and empower me.

The work of the Holy Spirit in filling the believer may be simply defined as that ministry which is accomplished in the believer when he is fully yielded to the indwelling Holy Spirit. Every reference to the filling of the Holy Spirit indicates a spiritual condition on the part of the person filled which is brought about by the complete control of the Spirit.²

The Spirit wants to fill me and accomplish His will in my life, but I must be yielded to Him, willing to let Him

¹ Warren Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary: New Testament*, Vol. 2 (Colorado Springs, Col., Victor Publishing, 2001), 48.

² John F. Walvoord, *The Holy Spirit* (Grand Rapids, MI., Zondervan Publishing, 1977), 192.

The Filling of the Holy Spirit

guide me according to Scripture. There must be an active submission on my part to say “yes” to what the Spirit wants to accomplish in my life, otherwise I’m resisting Him.

To be filled with the Spirit is to have the Spirit fulfilling in us all that God intended Him to do when he placed Him there. To be filled is not the problem of getting *more* of the Spirit: it is rather the problem of the Spirit getting *more* of us. We shall never have *more* of the Spirit than the anointing which every true Christian has received. On the other hand, the Spirit may have all of the believer and thus be able to manifest in him the life and character of Christ. A spiritual person, then, is one who experiences the divine purpose and plan in his daily life through the power of the indwelling Spirit. The *character* of that life will be the out-lived Christ. The cause of that life will be the unhindered indwelling Spirit (Ephesians 3:16-21; II Corinthians 3:18).³

Charles Ryrie states:

To be filled with the Spirit means to be controlled by the Spirit. The clue to this definition is found in Ephesians 5:18 where there is contrast and comparison between drunkenness and Spirit-filling. It is the comparison which gives the clue, for just as a drunken person is controlled by the liquor which he consumes, so a Spirit-filled Christian is controlled by the Spirit. This will cause him to act

³ Lewis S. Chafer, *He that is Spiritual* (Grand Rapids, Mich. Zondervan Publishing, 1967), 43-44.

The Filling of the Holy Spirit

in ways which are unnatural to him, not implying that such ways will be erratic or abnormal, but asserting that they will not be the ways of the old life. Control by the Spirit is a necessary part of spirituality.⁴

For the apostle Paul, the most obvious sign of being filled with the Spirit is the manifestation that follows. After giving the command to be filled with the Spirit, the apostle Paul then states that Christians are to be:

speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord; always giving thanks for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God, even the Father” (Eph. 5:19-20).

The spiritual Christian tends to have a song in his heart and an attitude of thankfulness toward God. This does not mean he cannot experience genuine grief or sorrow, or at times be angry while filled with Spirit. Certainly Jesus got angry and experienced sorrow, and He was spiritual in everything. However, as we follow Paul’s instructions in his letter to the Ephesians, the filling of the Spirit is followed by praise and thanksgiving in the believer.

⁴ Charles C. Ryrie, “What is Spirituality?” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 126 (1969): 206.

Illumination and the Doctrine of Election

He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him. In love He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will. (Eph. 1:4-5)

Election is based on God's sovereign choice and never the foreseen goodness of a person. Jacob and Esau were examples of this, "for though *the twins* were not yet born and had not done anything good or bad, so that God's purpose according to *His* choice would stand, not because of works but because of Him who calls, it was told to her, 'the older will serve the younger'" (Rom. 9:11-12). Some might want to charge God with being unfair. However, Paul states, "There is no injustice with God, is there? May it never be!" (Rom. 9:14). God's choosing some over others "*does not depend* on the man who wills or the man who runs, but on God who has mercy" (Rom. 9:16), for "He has mercy on whom He desires, and He hardens whom He desires" (Rom. 9:18).

In order for a person to be saved, he must believe in Jesus as the Savior (1 Cor. 15:3-4). This, of course, is the Jesus of Scripture, for no other Jesus will do. From the human side of salvation, faith in Jesus is the necessary response to God's call, and no one can be saved any other way (John 14:6; Acts 16:31). Salvation is a gift from God, and it's only with the empty hands of faith that we receive it. I say "empty hands" because we give nothing in exchange for it, but receive it as those who are spiritually bankrupt (Rom. 5:6-10; Eph. 2:1-3), extending our hands of

Illumination and the Doctrine of Election

faith to accept God's wonderful gift of eternal life. When God's elect hear the gospel message, they will believe in Christ as their Savior (Acts 13:48), and those who reject the gospel are left to stumble over the offense of the cross, which is an offense for them, "for they stumble because they are disobedient to the word, and to this *doom* they were also appointed" (1 Pet. 2:8).

What is the condition of man before God illumines his mind to the gospel? He is dead in his sins and destined for God's wrath. His understanding is darkened, he has no spiritual life, and he hardens his heart toward God (see Eph. 2:1-3). God saves because of

For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life. (John 3:16)

Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me." (John 14:6)

And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved. (Acts 4:12)

For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast. (Eph. 2:8-9)

The good news about Jesus as the Savior is found only in the revelation of Scripture (John 3:16; Rom. 10:13-

Illumination and the Doctrine of Election

15; 1 Cor. 15:3-4). Once the gospel is communicated, God illumines the mind of His elect to understand and respond favorably to it, with the result that they believe in Jesus as their Savior. As a vehicle of communication, God may use a person, the Scriptures, a gospel tract, a radio show, or any means that accurately communicates gospel truth. However, gospel truth itself, no matter how perfectly stated, will never lead an unbeliever to salvation if God does not illumine the mind to understand it. This was true for many who personally met Jesus but were never saved. I suspect Jesus met tens of thousands of people during His time of ministry, and yet only a small percentage were saved. As the God-Man, Jesus spoke and acted perfectly in every situation. His perfect words and actions did not persuade everyone to believe in Him as Savior. Why? Did Jesus fail to communicate clearly? Did He fail to show mercy, or grace, or righteousness? Did He fail to “love them into the kingdom?” Could He have said or done something better so that more people might have been saved? No! He is the God-man, and He made no mistakes. Most rejected Him as Savior in His day, and most reject Him today. There’s nothing wrong with Jesus or His message, it’s the human heart that’s corrupt (Jer. 17:9; Rom. 1:18-21). If God does not reveal Christ to the unbeliever, then no amount of argumentation, no matter how well stated, will lead even one sinner into heaven. We might as well preach to a rock. As an example of divine illumination, we have Peter’s confession about Jesus:

Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, He was asking His disciples, “Who do people say that the Son of Man is?” And they said, “Some say John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; but still others, Jeremiah, or one of the prophets.” He

Illumination and the Doctrine of Election

said to them, “But who do you say that I am?” Simon Peter answered, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” And Jesus said to him, “**Blessed are you, Simon Barjona, because flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but My Father who is in heaven.** (Matt. 16:13-17)

Peter came to know the truth that Jesus is “the Christ, the Son of the living God,” not because he personally investigated the matter and came to a logical conclusion; but rather, because God the Father chose to reveal it to him. It’s no different today. Men come to know and accept Jesus not because of eloquent argumentation, but because God opens their heart to know the truth. Another example of divine illumination can be found in the book of Acts where Paul was preaching to a group of women, and one woman in particular “named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple fabrics, a worshiper of God, was listening; **and the Lord opened her heart to respond to the things spoken by Paul**” (Acts 16:14). Here was a group of women, all hearing Paul speak the same message, yet Luke tells us that only one of them responded to “the things spoken by Paul,” because “the Lord opened her heart” to understand his words.

In another place Jesus stated that “no one knows the Son except the Father; nor does anyone know the Father except the Son, and anyone to whom the Son wills to reveal Him” (Matt. 11:27). God determines who will be saved, and only the elect will be illumined to God’s saving truth. This is troubling to some, because it strips them of any power to save themselves or others. Salvation is not what we do for God, but what He has done for us through the work of Christ. Salvation is appropriated only to those who

Illumination and the Doctrine of Election

believe, and a person believes because God has illumined his mind to the gospel. What of those who do not believe? They do not believe for two reasons:

1. They do not believe because of their personal choice. “He who believes in Him is not judged; he who does not believe has been judged already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God (John 3:18).
2. They do not believe because Satan imposes spiritual blindness upon them. “And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, in whose case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving so that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.” (2 Cor. 4:3-4)

I don't think we should try to force these two reasons into a logical order. Both are true and both go together like a hand in a glove. But we should not miss the point that

The blinding or veiling of the mind, mentioned in 2 Cor. 4:3, 4, is then a universal incapacity to comprehend the way of salvation, and is imposed upon unregenerate man by the arch enemy of God in his attempts to hinder the purpose of God in redemption. It is a condition of mind against which man can have no power. Yet God has provided a means whereby this satanic veil may be lifted, the eyes opened (Acts 26:18), the eyes of the heart enlightened (Eph. 1:18, R.V.), and the soul come into the illumination of the Gospel of the glory of Christ. Then, after this “opening of the eyes” is accomplished, the way of life, which is the Gospel,

Illumination and the Doctrine of Election

will seem, to the enlightened person, to be both desirable and of transcendent import. This great work is accomplished by Divine energy, and is one of the mightiest movements of the “power of God unto salvation.” It is spoken of in Scripture as the drawing of God and the convicting of the Spirit: “No man can come unto Me, except the Father which hath sent Me draw him” (John 6:44). “And when He (the Spirit) is come, He will convict the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment” (John 16:8).¹

That God has specific persons whom He’s elected to salvation is the teaching of Scripture:

He came to His own, and those who were His own did not receive Him. But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name, **who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.** (John 1:11-13)

All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out. (John 6:37)

No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up on the last day. (John 6:44)

¹ Lewis Sperry Chafer, *True Evangelism* (New York: Gospel Publishing House, 1911), 74-75.

Illumination and the Doctrine of Election

And He was saying, “For this reason I have said to you, that **no one can come to Me unless it has been granted him from the Father.**” As a result of this many of His disciples withdrew and were not walking with Him anymore. (John 6:65-66)

My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; and I give eternal life to them, and they will never perish; and no one will snatch them out of My hand. (John 10:27-28)

As Christians, I think we ought always to be sensitive to the Holy Spirit’s work in unbelievers, knowing that when God calls His elect to salvation, He may use us to share the gospel news. God has not only secured salvation in the person of Christ, but the method by which it is received (Rom. 10:11-15), and He will make sure His elect hear the gospel clearly. No clever argumentation or persuasive rhetoric is needed when witnessing to God’s elect, for they will hear the truth and respond with faith in Christ as God opens their hearts to the gospel. As believers, we are to know the gospel (1 Cor. 15:3-4), and be ready to share it at any moment as God gives us opportunity. We do not have to force the opportunity, but simply be ready when it comes; and then be clear in our speech, knowing that God is working in the hearts of His elect. To be saved, an unbeliever must know and believe the gospel (1 Cor. 15:3-4; cf. Rom. 10:11-15). If you’ve believed in Jesus for salvation, then you are among the elect.

Illumination and the Doctrine of Election

Atonement for Sins

Atonement for Sins¹

For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it to you on the altar to make atonement [Heb.

כָּפַר *kaphar*] for your souls; for it is the blood by reason of the life that makes atonement [Heb. כָּפַר *kaphar*]. (Lev. 17:11)

And according to the Law, *one may almost say*, all things are cleansed with blood, and without shedding of blood there is no forgiveness. (Heb. 9:22)

Atonement is a very important concept in the Old Testament. The word atonement translates the Hebrew verb כָּפַר (*kaphar*) which means to “cover over, pacify, propitiate, [or] atone for sin.”² The animal sacrificial system—which was part of the Mosaic Law—taught that sin must be atoned for. The idea of substitution was clearly taught as the sinner laid his hands on the animal that died in his place (Lev. 4:15, 24; 16:21). The innocent animal paid the price of death on behalf of the guilty sinner. God established the Levitical animal sacrificial system as a way of teaching that human sin must be atoned for. The atoning animal sacrifices were performed daily by the Jewish temple priests on behalf of Israelites who committed sins in

¹ This article is taken from my book, *The Cross of Christ: Sufficient to Save*, p. 33-38.

² Francis Brown, S.R. Driver and Charles A. Briggs, *The New Brown-Driver-Briggs-Gesenius Hebrew-English Lexicon* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers 1979), 497.

Atonement for Sins

ignorance (Lev. 4:1-4, 20, 26, 31). More serious sins—those deliberately committed—were atoned for once a year on the Day of Atonement—Yom Kippur—by the High Priest who would enter the Holy of Holies in the temple and sprinkle the blood of a sacrificed bull and goat on the mercy seat which was on the top of the Ark of the Covenant (Lev. 16:14-15). There were two sacrifices on the Day of Atonement: a bull was sacrificed for the sins of the High Priest (Lev. 16:6, 11), and two goats for the sins of the nation (Lev. 16:7-10). The sacrifice of the goats were “to make atonement for the sons of Israel for all their sins once every year” (Lev. 16:34). One goat shed its blood on the altar, and the other was sent away into the wilderness after the High Priest had laid his hands on it and confessed over it “all the iniquities of the sons of Israel and all their transgressions in regard to all their sins” (Lev. 16:21). The innocent animals died in place of those who were guilty of sin.

Atonement means making amends, blotting out the offense, and giving satisfaction for wrong done; thus reconciling to oneself the alienated other and restoring the disrupted relationship. Scripture depicts all human beings as needing to atone for their sins but lacking all power and resources for doing so. We have offended our holy Creator, whose nature it is to hate sin (Jer. 44:4; Hab. 1:13) and to punish it (Ps. 5:4-6; Rom. 1:18; 2:5-9). No acceptance by, or fellowship with, such a God can be expected unless atonement is made, and since there is sin in even our best actions, anything we do in hopes of making amends can only increase our guilt or worsen our situation. This makes it ruinous folly to seek to establish one’s own righteousness

Atonement for Sins

before God (Job 15:14-16; Rom. 10:2-3); it simply cannot be done.³

The animal sacrificial system under the Mosaic Law taught that God is holy, man is sinful, and that God was willing to judge an innocent creature as a substitute in place of the sinner. The animal that shed its blood gave up its life in place of the one who had offended God, and it was only through the shed blood that atonement was made. A life for a life. The whole animal sacrificial system under the Mosaic Law was highly symbolic, temporary, and pointed forward to the work of Jesus Christ on the cross. The Levitical priests would regularly perform their temple sacrifices on behalf of the people to God, but being a symbolic system, the animal sacrifices could never “make perfect those who draw near” to Him, for the simple reason that “it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins” (Heb. 10:1, 4). For nearly fourteen centuries the temple priests kept “offering time after time the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins” (Heb. 10:11), until finally Christ “offered one sacrifice for sins for all time” and through that one offering “perfected for all time those who are sanctified” by it (Heb. 10:12, 14). What the Mosaic Law could never accomplish through the sacrifice of symbols, Christ did once and for all time through His substitutionary death on the cross when he died in the place of sinners.

Jesus’ death on the cross was a satisfactory sacrifice to God which completely paid the price for our sin. We owed a debt to God that we could never pay, and Jesus paid

³ J. I. Packer, *Concise Theology* (Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House, 1995), 138.

Atonement for Sins

that debt in full when He died on the cross and bore the punishment that rightfully belonged to us. In Romans 3:25 Paul used the Greek word ἱλαστήριον (*hilasterion*)—translated *propitiation*—to show that Jesus’ shed blood completely satisfied God’s righteous demands toward our sin, with the result that there is nothing more for the sinner to pay to God. Jesus paid our sin-debt in full. There’s nothing for us to pay. The Apostle John tells us “He Himself is the propitiation [ἱλασμός *hilasmos* – the satisfactory sacrifice] for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for *those of the whole world*” (1 John 2:2; cf. 4:10). Jesus’ death on the cross forever satisfied God’s righteous demands toward the sins of everyone for all time! God has “canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us, which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross” (Col. 2:14). Regarding Christ’s death, J. Dwight Pentecost states:

You can be adjusted to God’s standard, because God made Christ to become sin for us. The One who knew no sin, the One in whose lips had never been found guile, took upon Himself our sin in order that He might bear our sins to the cross and offer Himself as an acceptable substitute to God for us—on our behalf, in our place. And when Jesus Christ identified Himself with sinners and went to the cross on their behalf and in their place, He was making possible the doctrine of reconciliation. He was making it possible for God to conform the world to Himself, to adjust the world to His standard so that sinners in the world might find salvation because “Jesus paid it all.” You can be adjusted to God, to God’s standard, through Christ,

Atonement for Sins

by His death, by His cross, by His blood, and by His identification with sinners.⁴

Atonement for sins is the basis for reconciliation, because God has judged our sins in the Person of Christ who died on the cross in our place. The death of Christ has forever satisfied God's righteous demands for our sin and it is on this basis that He can accept sinners before His throne of grace. The blood of Christ is the only coin in the heavenly realm that God accepts as payment for our sin-debt, and Christ paid our sin debt in full! That's good news!

Now all *these* things are from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation, namely, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and He has committed to us the word of reconciliation. (2 Cor. 5:18-19)

Because Jesus' death satisfies God's righteousness demands for sin, the sinner can approach God who welcomes him in love. God has cleared the way for sinners to come to Him for a new relationship, and this is based completely on the substitutionary work of Christ. God has done everything to reconcile us to Himself. The sin debt that we owed to God has been paid in full by the blood of Christ.

⁴ J. Dwight Pentecost, *Things Which Become Sound Doctrine* (Grand Rapids, Mi., Kregel Publications, 1965), 89.

Atonement for Sins

The Gospel Message

The Gospel Message

Now I make known to you, brethren, the gospel [εὐαγγέλιον *euaggelion* – good news message] which I preached to you, which also you received, in which also you stand, by which also you are saved, if you hold fast the word which I preached to you, unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures. (1 Cor. 15:1-4)

God's gospel message is simple in its presentation (1 Cor. 15:3-4). It is a message of love and grace (John 3:16-17; Eph. 2:8-9). It centers at the cross where Jesus died for all our sins (1 Cor. 1:18, 21; 15:3-4; Col. 2:13-14; 1 Pet. 2:24). The gospel message only makes sense when we understand that God is holy, all mankind is sinful, and that Jesus necessarily died as our substitute. God's holiness means He is positively righteous and completely set apart from sin (Ps. 99:9; 1 Pet. 1:14-16). Because God is holy, He cannot have anything to do with sin except to condemn it. The Scripture states, "Your eyes are too pure to approve evil, and You can not look on wickedness with favor" (Hab. 1:13), and "This is the message we have heard from Him and announce to you, that God is Light, and in Him there is no darkness at all" (1 John 1:5).

The gospel is the solution to a problem; it is the good news that follows the bad news. The bad news-problem is sin, which according to Scripture is a threefold

The Gospel Message

problem: first and foremost is Adam's original sin which is charged to every person (Rom. 5:12, 18-19; 1 Cor. 15:21-22), second is the sin nature which is the source of the rebellious heart (Rom. 7:14-25; 13:12-14), and lastly is the personal sin each person produces every time he/she yields to temptation (Jam. 1:14-15). Sin brings death and separation from God (Isa. 59:2; Rom. 5:12), both in time and in eternity (Rev. 20:11-15). Because of sin, every person is spiritually dead and powerless to change their situation (Rom. 5:6-10; Eph. 2:1). All people are helpless to save themselves, and good works are worthless in God's sight (Isa. 64:6; Eph. 2:8-9; Tit. 3:5).

For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast. (Eph. 2:8-9)

He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit (Tit. 3:5)

The good news-solution is that "Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures" (1 Cor. 15:3-4). This is substitutionary atonement. Jesus died in our place, "the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God" (1 Pet. 3:18; cf. Rom. 5:6-10). The gospel teaches that Jesus died on the cross and paid the penalty for our sin in order to satisfy God's holiness (Rom. 3:25; 8:3; 2 Cor. 5:21; Gal. 3:13). Jesus "is the propitiation [ἱλασμός *hilasmos* - satisfaction] for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole

The Gospel Message

world” (1 John 2:2; cf. Rom. 3:25; 1 John 4:10). Jesus paid the redemption price for our sins (Rom. 3:24), and offers us eternal life if we’ll trust Christ as our Savior (John 3:16-17). When we trust in Christ as our Savior, we are forgiven all our sins (Eph. 1:7; Col. 1:14), positionally identified with Him (Rom. 5:14-18; 1 Cor. 15:22), given eternal life (John 3:16; 10:27-28), given the gift of God’s righteousness (Rom. 5:17; 2 Cor. 5:21; Phil. 3:9), and have the power to live righteously (Rom. 6:1-13). God saves from the penalty of sin (Jo. 5:24; Rom. 6:23; 8:1), the power of sin (Rom. 6:11; 8:13; 2 Cor. 5:17), and ultimately the presence of sin (Phil. 3:21; 1 Jo. 3:2).

Salvation is never what we do for God, but rather what He has done for us by sending His Son to die in our place and bear the wrath for sin that was due to us (Isa. 53). We are helpless to save ourselves because we are completely crippled by sin (Rom. 5:6-10; 6:23; Eph. 2:1); therefore, salvation comes to us only as a free gift from God (Eph. 2:8-9; Tit. 3:5), “being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus” (Rom 3:24). Jesus paid the price for our sin, and we need only to trust Him for salvation (John 3:16, 20:31; Rom. 3:25). We do not earn or deserve salvation. Salvation is completely the work of God, and those saved are the recipients of His grace (Eph. 2:8-10; Tit. 3:5).

Salvation is said to be “the gift of God” (Eph. 2:8), “according to His own purpose and grace which was granted us in Christ Jesus from all eternity” (2 Tim. 1:9), and “according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit” (Tit. 3:5). God has prepared good works to follow our salvation (Eph. 2:10), but they are never the condition of it (Acts

The Gospel Message

16:30-31; Eph. 2:8-9; 2 Tim. 1:9; Tit. 3:5). The matter is simple: Salvation comes to those who believe in Christ as their Savior (John 3:16; 20:31; Acts 16:30-31).

The Raising of the Cross

The Raising of the Cross



The Raising of the Cross was painted by Rembrandt sometime around A.D. 1633. In the painting the artist portrayed himself as one among many who placed Christ on the cross to bear the sin of all mankind. You can see Rembrandt in the center of the painting wearing his painter's hat. Rembrandt is telling everyone that it was his sin that sent Christ to the cross, and that it was his hands

The Raising of the Cross

that lifted Him up to die. There is a richness of Christian theology in the painting.

I understand what Rembrandt is communicating in the picture. It speaks for itself. More so, I personally identify with the artist, because I see my hands raising the cross of Christ. I too am guilty of the sin that put Him there to die in my place. The cross of Christ is essential to the gospel message of Christianity (1 Cor. 1:17-18; 15:3-4), and every Christian who believes in Jesus as his Savior—at some point in his learning—should come to see himself at the cross, for Scripture teaches that “we died with Him” (2 Tim. 2:11; cf. Col. 2:20).

When we think about Jesus, we know from Scripture that He is simultaneously the eternal Son of God and true humanity. At a point in time, the eternal Son of God took upon Himself sinless humanity and walked among men (John 1:1, 14, 18). In theology, this is called the doctrine of the *hypostatic union*. Though He is fully God, we must always keep His perfect humanity in our thinking as well. While in the Garden of Gethsemane, just hours before the crucifixion, it was the humanity of Christ that struggled to face the cross. In the Garden, Jesus “fell on His face and prayed, saying, “My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; yet not as I will, but as You will”” (Matt. 26:39). Jesus went to the cross as His Father willed. When we think about the cross, we realize that it was not Jesus’ deity that died for our sins, but His humanity, as Peter tells us, “He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross” (1 Pet. 2:24). Peter’s reference to “His body” speaks of the humanity of Jesus.

The Raising of the Cross

Concerning the death of Christ on the cross, The Bible reveals it was simultaneously an act of God as well as sinful men. When delivering his sermon about the crucifixion of Jesus in Acts chapter 2, Peter declared, “this *Man*, delivered over by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put *Him* to death” (Acts 2:23). In one verse, Peter captures the coalescence of divine and human wills that participated in putting Christ on the cross. On the divine side, Jesus was “delivered over by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God”, and on the human side, He was “nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men [who] put *Him* to death.” Jesus was not a helpless victim, torn between the will of God and sinful men, but a willing sacrifice who chose to lay down His life for the salvation of others. The prophet Isaiah declares:

But the LORD was pleased to crush Him, putting *Him* to grief; if He would render Himself as a guilt offering, He will see *His* offspring, He will prolong *His* days, and the good pleasure of the LORD will prosper in His hand. As a result of the anguish of His soul, He will see *it and* be satisfied; by His knowledge the Righteous One, My Servant, will justify the many, as He will bear their iniquities. (Isa. 53:10-11)

The language is plain, “the LORD was pleased to crush Him, putting *Him* to grief; if He would render Himself *as a guilt offering*” (Isa. 53:10a). God punishes sin as His righteousness requires, and saves the sinner as His love desires. It is at the same time true that *God sent* and *Christ went*. Christ was willing to be put to death in our place, for the Scripture declares “Christ also loved you and

The Raising of the Cross

gave Himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God as a fragrant aroma” (Eph. 5:2). Jesus said “I lay down My life for the sheep” (John 10:15), and “no one has taken it away from Me, but I lay it down on My own initiative” (John 10:18). Other passages in Scripture clearly reveal that Christ went to the cross willingly and laid down His life for our benefit (Gal. 2:20; Eph. 5:25; Heb. 7:27; 9:14). Jesus was punished in our place so that we might have forgiveness of sins and the gifts of eternal life and righteousness (John 3:16; 10:27-28; Eph. 1:7; 2:8-9; 2 Cor. 5:21; Philip. 3:9; 1 Pet. 3:18).

We must not see Christ dying at a distant time or place. Like Rembrandt, we must see ourselves at the cross. We should see our hands driving the nails that put Him there and then lifting the cross. We must see Jesus bearing all our sin, and paying the penalty of the Father’s wrath that rightfully belongs to us. Several years ago I wrote a poem and tried to capture in words what Rembrandt captured in his painting.

The Raising of the Cross

Christ to the Cross

I and the Father led Christ to the cross,
Together we placed Him there;
I pushed Him forward, no care for the cost,
His Father's wrath to bear.
Christ in the middle not wanting to die,
Knelt in the garden and prayed;
Great tears of blood the Savior did cry,
Yet His Father He humbly obeyed.

So He carried His cross down a dusty trail,
No words on His lips were found;
No cry was uttered as I drove the nails,
His arms to the cross were bound.
I lifted my Savior with arms spread wide,
He hung between heaven and earth;
I raised my spear and pierced His side,
What flowed was of infinite worth.

Like a Lamb to the altar Christ did go,
A sacrifice without blemish or spot;
A knife was raised, and life did flow,
In a basin the blood was caught.
Past the incense table and the dark black veil,
To that holy of holy places;
The blood of Christ was made to avail,
And all my sins it erases.

Now this Lamb on a cross was a demonstration
Of the Father's love for me;
For the Savior's death brought satisfaction,
Redeemed, and set me free.
Now I come to the Savior by faith alone,
Not trusting in works at all;
Jesus my substitute for sin did atone,
Salvation in answer to His call.

Steven R. Cook
May, 2006

The Raising of the Cross

The Doctrine of Soteriology

The Doctrine of Soteriology

Acts 4:12 “And there is salvation [Grk. noun = σωτηρία *soteria* – deliverance or rescue from harm] in no one else; for there is no other name [other than Jesus] under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved [Grk. verb = σώζω *sozo*].”

The word *soteriology* comes from two Greek words: *soter* σωτήρ which means *savior, deliverer, perserver*¹ and *logos* λόγος, which in the Greek means *statement* or *speech*, but in English means *the study of*. Soteriology, then, is the study of salvation as it has been revealed in Scripture. The most common word for salvation in the Hebrew OT is *yasha* עָשָׂה (sometimes as *yeshuah* יְשׁוּעָה) which means “*deliverance, rescue, salvation, also safety, [and] welfare*.”² Salvation in the OT was primarily physical, as one might be delivered from his enemy in battle or from a plague (2 Sam. 22:3-4; 1 Chron. 16:23, 35; Job 5:4, 11; Ps. 3:6-8; 44:4-8; 85:7, 9; 89:26; Isa. 17:10; 45:8; Mic. 7:7). Charles Ryrie comments:

¹ Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed., rev. and ed. Fredrick William Danker (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 985.

² Francis Brown, Samuel Rolles Driver and Charles Augustus Briggs, *Enhanced Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*, electronic ed. (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, 2000), 447.

The Doctrine of Soteriology

The most important Hebrew root word related to salvation in the Old Testament is *yasha*. Originally it meant to be roomy or broad in contrast to narrowness or oppression. Thus it signifies freedom from what binds or restricts, and it came to mean deliverance, liberation, or giving width and breadth to something...Faith was the necessary condition for salvation in the Old Testament as well as in the New. Abraham believed in the Lord, and the Lord counted it to him for righteousness (Gen. 15:6).³

The NT writers primarily use the following words:

1. *Sozo* (verb) refers to the **act of physical deliverance** in some biblical passages (Matt. 8:25; 14:30; Mark 13:20; Luke 6:9; John 11:12; Acts 27:20, 31), and **spiritual deliverance** in other Scriptures (Luke 7:50; 19:10; John 12:47; 1 Cor. 1:21; Tit. 3:5; Heb. 7:25). As to our spiritual deliverance, we are saved from the **penalty of sin** (Rom. 5:16; 8:1, 33-34; Eph. 2:8-9), the **power of sin** (Rom. 6:11; Col. 3:5), and ultimately the **presence of sin** (1 John 3:2, 5).
2. *Soter* (noun) means **Savior**, and refers to the agent of salvation, the **one who rescues or delivers another** from harm or danger (Luke 2:11; John 4:42; Acts 5:31; 13:23; Eph. 5:23; Phil. 3:20). This refers to the agent of salvation.
3. *Soteria* (noun) refers to **the provision of salvation, rescue, or deliverance brought by another** (Luke 1:69, 19:9; John 4:22; Acts 7:25; 13:26, 47; Rom.

³ Charles C. Ryrie, *Basic Theology* (Chicago, Ill.: Moody Press, 1999), 321.

The Doctrine of Soteriology

1:16; 2 Cor. 1:6; 6:2; Eph. 1:13; Phil. 1:28; 2:12; 2 Tim. 2:10; Heb. 1:14; 9:28; 1 Pet. 1:5, 9; 2 Pet. 3:15).

As to the meaning of the word *salvation*, the Old and New Testaments are much alike. The word communicates the thought of deliverance, safety, preservation, soundness, restoration, and healing; but though so wide a range of human experience is expressed by the word *salvation*, its specific, major use is to denote a work of God in behalf of man.⁴

God created mankind in His image and without sin (Gen. 1:26-27). However, Adam and Eve committed sin and corrupted the entire hum race with sin (Gen. 3:1-8; Rom. 3:23; 5:12; 1 Cor. 15:21-22). All of Adam's descendants are born into this world spiritually dead in "trespasses and sins" (Eph. 2:1), and are by nature "children of wrath" (Eph. 2:3), "separate from Christ...having no hope and without God in the world" (Eph. 2:12), alienated from God (Col. 1:21), and "devoid of the Spirit" (Jude 1:19; cf. Rom. 8:9). Biblically, men are sinners in three ways:

1. By imputation of Adam's sin (Rom. 5:12-21).⁵
2. By nature (Ps. 51:5; Rom. 7:19-21; Eph. 2:3).
3. By choice (1 Kings 8:46; Rom. 3:9-18).

⁴ Lewis S. Chafer, "Soteriology" *Bibliotheca Sacra*, 109 (1945): 11-12.

⁵ Imputation here means that God credits or charges Adam's original sin and its guilt to all his offspring.

The Doctrine of Soteriology

The Bible teaches that man is completely marked by sin in every aspect of his being. Sin permeates his thoughts, feelings and volition (i.e. will). The sin nature resides in every person and negatively influences his relationships with other people, and most of all with God. This means that men are unable to save themselves (Rom. 5:6-10; Eph. 2:1-3). However, from eternity past, God also decreed to provide salvation through the death of Christ (Rev. 13:8; cf. Eph. 1:3-6), and this provision was not based on any merit or worthiness in sinful men (Rom. 3:21-26; 4:1-5), but is founded solely on His love, grace, and mercy (John 3:16; Eph. 2:1-9; Tit. 3:5). **Salvation is never what men do for God, but what God has done for men through the substitutionary atoning work of His Son who bore the penalty of their sin on the cross and who freely gives eternal life and imputes His righteousness to those who believe in Christ as their Savior** (Isa. 53; John 3:16; 20:31; Rom. 3:21-26; 2 Cor. 5:21; Phil. 3:9; 1 Peter 3:18; 1 John 2:2). All of us are “justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus” (Rom. 3:24).

In its broadest significance, the doctrine of Salvation includes every divine undertaking for the believer from his deliverance out of the lost estate to his final presentation in glory conformed to the image of Christ. Since the divine objective is thus all-inclusive, the theme is divided naturally into three tenses: (a) the Christian *was* saved when he believed (Luke 7:50; Acts 16:30, 31; 1 Cor 1:18; 2 Cor 2:15; Eph 2:8 R.V.; 2 Tim 1:9). This past-tense aspect of it is the essential and unchanging fact of salvation. At the moment of believing, the saved one is completely delivered from his lost estate, cleansed, forgiven,

The Doctrine of Soteriology

justified, born of God, clothed in the merit of Christ, freed from all condemnation, and safe for evermore. (b) The believer is *being* saved from the dominion of sin (Rom 6:1–14; 8:2 ; 2 Cor 3:18; Gal 2:20; 4:19 ; Phil 1:19; 2:12). In this second tense of salvation the believer is being divinely preserved and sanctified. (c) The believer is *yet* to be saved from the presence of sin when presented faultless in glory (Rom 13:11; 1 Thess 5:8; Heb 1:14; 9:28 ; 1 Pet 1:3–5; 1 John 3:1–3). To this may be added other passages which, each in turn, present all three tenses or aspects of salvation—1 Corinthians 1:30; Philippians 1:6, Ephesians 5:25–27; 1 Thessalonians 1:9–10; Titus 2:11–13.⁶

All are saved by hearing God’s promises and believing Him to be true to His word, that He will provide forgiveness of sins, the imputation of righteousness, and the gift of eternal life to all who place their faith in Jesus as Savior (John 3:16; 6:28-29, 40; 20:31; Acts 16:30-31). “All that is required of any man is to accept what God has provided in Christ. If a man by faith accepts the offer of life, he is born again of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit follows up the work begun in regeneration and perfects holiness in the believer.”⁷ From beginning to end, *regeneration*, *sanctification* and *glorification* are all the work of God for the benefit of men and women. People respond positively to the call and work of God in their

⁶ Lewis S. Chafer, “Soteriology” *Bibliotheca Sacra*, 109 (1945): 13.

⁷ Henry Clarence Thiessen and Vernon D. Doerksen, *Lectures in Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1979), 204.

The Doctrine of Soteriology

lives, but even this is because God has moved their hearts to action (John 6:44, 65; Acts 13:48; 16:13-14).

Biblical Humility

Biblical Humility

Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; do not *merely* look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others. (Phi. 2:3-4)

In Scripture, the humble are sometimes described as those who live in impoverished or difficult conditions (Deut. 15:7; 1 Sam. 2:7; 2 Sam. 22:28; Jam. 1:9); however, the inward virtue of humility does not automatically belong to those who are poor or suffer life's hardships. Humility is a lowliness of mind, an inward quietness before the Lord that reflects a poverty of spirit. The humble know they need God and seek Him for wisdom, guidance and strength. Humility is not a natural quality, nor does it come easily, but it is what the Lord requires of His people (Mic. 6:8; Eph. 4:1-2; Phi. 2:3-4). The humble live with a constant sense of their weaknesses and inability to cope with life apart from God, and are keenly aware of their sinful nature and propensity to turn away from the Lord and befriend the world. Humility is not a sense of worthlessness, but unworthiness of the Lord's love and blessings. The humble realize they deserve nothing good in this life, and any blessing they receive is from God's grace.

Humility in the spiritual sense is an inwrought grace of the soul that allows one to think of himself no more highly than he ought to think (Eph. 4:1-2; Col. 3:12-13; cf. Rom. 12:3)...It requires us to feel that in God's sight we have no merit and to in honor prefer others to ourselves (Rom. 12:10; cf. Prov.

Biblical Humility

15:33). It does not demand undue self-depreciation but rather lowliness of self-estimation and freedom from vanity. The Gk. term *praotēs*, “gentleness” (rendered “meekness” in KJV) expresses a spirit of willingness and obedience and a lack of resistance to God’s dealings with us. But humility must also be expressed towards those who wrong us, in order that their insults and wrongdoing might be used by God for our benefit (*see* Acts 20:18–21). It is enjoined of God (Ps. 25:9; Col. 3:12; James 4:6, 10) and is essential to discipleship under Christ (Matt. 18:3–4).¹

Humility should not be thought of as passivity or weakness. On the contrary, the humble person pursues righteousness and justice (Mic. 6:8) and can be very bold and outspoken. Moses was very humble when doing the Lord’s will and standing confidently against Pharaoh to deliver the Israelites from Egyptian bondage (Exodus chapters 3-12). Jesus was humble when driving the money changers from the temple (Matt. 21:12-13), or rebuking the Jewish leaders for their arrogance and hypocrisy (Matt. 23:13-33). Humility is not thinking less of self, but more of others. Paul writes, “Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves” (Phi. 2:3). True Christian humility is voluntary—or self-imposed—as the believer surrenders his personal desires in loving service to others for their spiritual and material benefit. Humility has the notion of child-like dependence, as Jesus taught His disciples (Matt. 18:3-4). The greatest display of

¹ Merrill Frederick Unger, “Humility” *The New Unger’s Bible Dictionary* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1988).

Biblical Humility

humility is found in God the Son who left His glory in heaven (Phi. 2:5-8; cf. John 17:5), became a man (John 1:1, 14; Heb. 10:5), became the servant of others (Mark 10:45; John 13:1-17), and ultimately “humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross” (Phi. 2:8). The glory of humility is seen at the cross (John 12:23, 32-33), where Jesus gave His life as an atoning substitutionary sacrifice for others (Rom. 5:6-10; 1 Cor. 15:3-4; 2 Pet. 3:18).

Humility is the basis for teachability, as David writes, “Good and upright is the LORD; therefore He instructs sinners in the way. He leads the humble in justice, and He teaches the humble His way” (Ps. 25:8-9). We sin when we ignore God and try to live independently of Him. Sometimes God uses difficult circumstances to humble us and bring us to the place of perpetual dependence on Him, even though it is our nature to fight against being in the helpless place (read Dan. 4:28-37; 2 Cor. 12:7-10). Being in the difficult situation—the place of suffering—is sometimes exactly where God wants us, and “the brother of humble circumstances is to glory in his high position” (Jam. 1:9).

Scripture provides a true estimation of reality, allowing us to see God, the world and ourselves from the divine perspective. The Bible teaches that we come from God and that we have worth because we are made in His image (Gen. 1:26-27). We live and breathe and eat and enjoy life because God provides for us every moment of every day (Matt. 6:25-32). God seeks out the humble, for he says in Isaiah, “to this one I will look, to him who is humble and contrite of spirit, and who trembles at My word” (Isa. 66:2). And Jesus said, “I am the vine, you are

Biblical Humility

the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing” (John 15:5). “Jesus does not demand visible self-abasement (cf. Mt. 6:16 ff.; Mk. 2:18–19) but a total trust in God that expects everything from him and nothing from self.”² This is strength through weakness, victory through humility, realizing “the battle is the LORD’S” (1 Sam. 17:47; cf. 2 Chron. 14:11; 20:15). Scripture reveals the victories of life are not by self-effort, for the Lord declares, “‘Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit,’ says the LORD of hosts” (Zech. 4:6), and, “He gives strength to the weary, and to *him who* lacks might He increases power” (Isa. 40:29). Ultimately, “The LORD is near to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit” (Ps. 34:18).

Humility is freedom from arrogance. Arrogance is an overbearing self-importance which leads to rejection of Divine truth and authority. An arrogant person has a false estimation of himself, his abilities, and the world (1 John 2:16). An arrogant person believes *perception is reality* (Isa. 1:18; 55:8-9). According to the Bible, human perception is merely a rough approximation of reality, but it is never equal to it. An arrogant person has an inflated sense of his own abilities and self-worth which leads to pseudo-confidence (1 John 2:16). An arrogant person rarely sees his own faults, but only the faults of others (Jude 16).

The prideful person rejects God and His revelation and seeks to operate independently of the Lord. The

² Gerhard Kittel, Gerhard Friedrich and Geoffrey William Bromiley, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 1985), 1155.

Biblical Humility

believer needs to be aware of pride, for “Pride *goes* before destruction, and a haughty spirit before stumbling” (Prov. 16:18). Arrogant people rarely see their own faults, but almost always focus on the faults of others. Solomon writes about prideful men and states, “When pride comes, then comes dishonor, but with the humble is wisdom” (Prov. 11:2), and, “A man’s pride will bring him low, but a humble spirit will obtain honor” (Prov. 29:23). It is the humble person who finds success in life; not necessarily a worldly success, but a divine success, in which the believer lives by faith and pleases the Lord (Heb. 11:6).

Biblical Humility

Love your Enemies

Love your Enemies

Jesus told His disciples to “love your enemies” and to “do good to those who hate you” (Luke 6:27). As a Christian, I’ve often wrestled with the command to love my enemies. It does not come naturally or easily. Biblical love and worldly love are different. Worldly love is often couched in terms of affection or how I feel about someone. For many years I used to think I was supposed to have warm fuzzy feelings for my enemies. I now realize that’s wrong. **Biblical love is a commitment to seek the best interest of others according to God’s values.** I don’t have to like a person to be committed to them and to seek their best interest according to God’s values. I can apply biblical love to everyone, whether it’s my spouse, my child, my brother, my coworker, or even my enemies.

The word *love* in Luke 6:27 is a translation of the Greek verb *agapao*. The verb *agapao* is in the *imperative mood*, which means Jesus is commanding believers to love their enemies. It’s important to understand that God commands our mind and will, but never our emotions. It’s impossible to command an emotion. Feelings simply respond to thought and action. I can have an imaginary thought and experience a real emotion. For example, I could sit in a room by myself and imagine an evil woman killing a helpless infant by strangling him to death. I could then imagine this woman disposing of the baby’s body and then going on with her life and being successful and prosperous and never being caught or punished for the murder she committed. Though fictional, this image evokes emotion within me. Anger is the emotion that comes as a response to a perceived injustice, real or

Love your Enemies

imagined. My emotions cannot differentiate reality from fiction. They only respond to the thoughts in my mind, and when I have thoughts of injustice—whether real or imagined—I get angry. Emotion always follows thought. As I think, so I feel.

Loving our enemies has little to do with how we feel. If anything, we love them by faith in spite of how we feel. We don't have to like our enemies to love them. We don't have to approve of their false beliefs, sinful lifestyle, or cultural values, but we are commanded to love them. Loving our enemies means that we identify those who hate us, and perhaps mean to harm us, and commit ourselves to their best interest by seeking God's will for their lives. We love them by praying for them, acting in a Christian manner and speaking God's truth to them when given the opportunity.

Biblically, there is no greater expression of love than Jesus Christ. All that Jesus said and did was done graciously and in love towards others. Certainly the love and goodness He displayed to His enemies was never based on their worthiness. Jesus displayed love and goodness when:

1. Healing the sick (Matt. 8:1-4).
2. Casting out demons (Matt. 8:16).
3. Feeding the multitudes (Matt. 14:19-20).
4. Speaking divine Truth (John 1:14; 14:6).
5. Rebuking the arrogant (Matt. 23:11-39).
6. Dying for sinners (Rom. 5:8; 1 Cor. 15:3-4).
7. Providing eternal life (John 10:28).

Love your Enemies

These are but a few of the loving and good acts of Christ. We are all naturally drawn to the pleasant things that Christ did such as healing the sick and feeding the hungry. Yet, in love and goodness He also spoke perfect truth and rebuked the arrogant, even if they hated Him because of it. Sometimes it is an act of love and goodness to point others to God by sharing the truth they need to hear, even if it exposes their sin and makes them feel uncomfortable. Sometimes people respond positively, but often they respond negatively. At one time, Jesus told the Pharisees, “You are seeking to kill Me, a man who has told you the truth” (John 8:41). Later, after another discussion with the Pharisees, some of Jesus disciples came to Him and said, “Do You know that the Pharisees were offended when they heard this statement?” (Matt. 15:12). Apparently, Jesus offended some of the Pharisees with His words, and I suspect the omniscient Son of God knew exactly what He was saying and the impact it would have on those to whom He said it. Jesus still offends people today, though His written words and deeds could not provide a greater display of love than what is recorded in the biblical text.

Being a Christian means being like Christ. It means learning His Word and acting as He would act. Unbelievers are sometimes positive to Christian love and goodness, but sometimes they are negative to it, even hating the Christian for being like Christ. In fact, Jesus warned His disciples that they would be hated for following Him and said, “Blessed are you when men hate you, and ostracize you, and insult you, and scorn your name as evil, for the sake of the Son of Man” (Luke 6:22). This is a difficult saying and certainly one that should make every believer count the cost of discipleship. However, though

Love your Enemies

there are times we will face opposition for our Christianity, there is much about the Christian life that is beautiful. There is a love and kindness in Christianity that the world does not know and never will, because it does not know Christ. Though we cannot say and do all that Jesus did, nor can we be as perfect as He was; yet we are to strive to love and do good to others as Christ commands. Sometimes loving our enemies and doing good means being gentle and kind and tender, meeting physical and spiritual needs as they arise, but others times it means speaking strongly, rebuking, and even giving offense. There is a time to speak softly and graciously in order to preserve peace (Ps. 34:14; Prov. 15:1, 18; 16:32; 17:14; Rom. 12:18; 14:19; Heb. 12:14); however, there is also a time for strong language to correct those who need it (Matt. 16:21-23; 23:13-39; Acts 13:9-11; 1 Cor. 3:1-3; Gal. 2:11-14; Heb. 5:11-14). **How we behave in love depends on what the other person needs to bring them to God.** Love can be both gentle and strong. Grace means we're doing it sacrificially for their best interest. Remember, **Biblical love is a commitment to seek the best interest of others according to God's values.**

God Loves Israel

God Loves Israel

God loves Israel, declaring, “I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore I have drawn you with lovingkindness” (Jer. 31:3). God is eternal, and His love is eternal. To possess the love of God is to love that which he loves. One cannot claim to have God’s love, and simultaneously hate Israel, His chosen people. There is no place for anti-Semitism in the heart of any Christian.

To love Israel is not a blanket endorsement of all their beliefs and behaviors. God, who loves Israel and chose them to be His people (Deut. 7:6-8), also called them to be holy (Ex. 19:5-6; Lev. 11:45), and promised blessing or cursing, based on their obedience to Him (Deut. 28:1-68). Israel can and does fail, often rejecting God’s love for them and walking in the ways of the world (see 2 Chron. 36:15-16; Jer. 7:25-26; 25:4-7; Ezek. 16; Matt. 23:1-39; Acts 7:51-53; 1 Thess. 2:14-16). The national rejection and crucifixion of Jesus (Matt. 27:22-23; Acts 2:22-23; 4:27-28), Israel’s promised Messiah (Deut. 18:15; Isa. 7:14; 9:6-7; 53; 61:1; Matt. 1:1, 17; Luke 1:31-33), is their greatest failure. Did Israel act alone in crucifying Jesus, their Messiah? No! God foretold Israel’s Messiah would suffer and die (Ps. 22:11-18; Isa. 53); and, according to His sovereignty, He used wicked men, both Jews and Gentiles, to accomplish His will (Acts 22:22-23; 4:27-28).

If it be inquired, as constantly it is, who put Christ to death? It may be pointed out that He was offered by the Father (Ps. 22:15; John 3:16; Rom. 3:25), of His own free will (John 10:17; Heb. 7:27; 9:14; 10:12), by the Spirit (Heb. 9:14), and by men—

God Loves Israel

Herod, Pilate, the Gentiles, and Israel (Acts 2:23; 4:27). To this may be added that part of His death was contributed by Satan (cf. Gen. 3:15).¹

God, who loves Israel with an everlasting love, continues to keep His word to them. Israel has a future hope because of the promises and covenants God made through the patriarchs and prophets (Gen. 12:1-3; 15:18; 17:8; Deut. 30:1-10; 2 Sam. 7:16; Ps. 89:33-37; Jer. 31:31-33). Though unbelieving Israel is currently under divine discipline (Matt. 23:37-39), God's covenants and promises are still in effect (Rom. 9:1-5), and will remain in force until Jesus returns and is accepted as their Messiah.

It is wrong to think the church has replaced Israel, for "God has not rejected His people whom He foreknew" (Rom. 11:2), even though there is a "partial hardening" among them until Messiah returns (Rom. 11:25-27). Until then, unbelieving Israel is under spiritual darkness and divine judgment. The apostle Paul—a biological Jew himself—revealed that God's promises and covenants are still valid for national Israel.

I am telling the truth in Christ, I am not lying, my conscience testifies with me in the Holy Spirit, that I have great sorrow and unceasing grief in my heart [for unbelieving Israel]. For I could wish that I myself were accursed, *separated* from Christ for the sake of my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh [to whom Paul is related biologically], who

¹ Lewis S. Chafer, "Christology" in *Systematic Theology*, Vol. 7 (Grand Rapids, MI., Kregel Publications, 1993), 80.

God Loves Israel

are Israelites, to whom belongs the adoption as sons, and the glory and the covenants and the giving of the Law and the *temple* service and the promises, whose are the fathers, and from whom is the Christ according to the flesh [i.e. Messiah], who is over all, God blessed forever. Amen. (Rom. 9:1-5)

Today, Jews and Gentiles alike, become partakers of the church, the body of Christ (Eph. 1:22-23; cf. 1 Cor. 10:32), when they believe in Jesus as their Savior (Gal. 3:26-28). The church is looking forward to the return of Christ, in which He will catch away (ἄρπάζω *harpazo* – to seize, catch up, snatch away) Christians to heaven (1 Thess. 4:13-17). Until God resumes His prophetic plans for Israel, the Christian is called to love them, pray for them, and share the gospel of grace that they may turn to Jesus as the Christ and be saved (Rom. 1:16; 1 Cor. 1:18-24; 15:3-4).

God Loves Israel

The Sin of Idolatry

The Sin of Idolatry

You shall have no other gods before Me. You shall not make for yourself an idol [פֶּסֶל *pesel* – an idol or carved image], or any likeness of what is in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the water under the earth. You shall not worship [שָׁחָה *shachah* – to worship, bow down] them or serve [עָבַד *abad* – serve, work] them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children, on the third and the fourth generations of those who hate Me. (Ex. 20:3-5)

What is idolatry?

Idolatry is the selfish sin of substitution in which we devote ourselves to worship something or someone in the place of God. It is foremost a sin of a covetous heart that leads us to desire more than what God provides, and to trust something or someone lesser than God to satisfy our wants and needs. Paul addresses the heart of idolatry when he writes that covetousness “is idolatry” (Col. 3:5). Covetousness is idolatry because the covetous heart desires things and pleasures more than God. The believer who is satisfied with God is content with what he has (1 Tim. 6:7-11; cf. Phil. 4:11), but the covetous heart is never content and always seeks more (i.e. money, success, friends, etc.) in order to feel secure or to please the flesh.

In a general sense idolatry is the paying of divine honor to any created thing; the ascription of divine power to natural agencies. Idolatry may be classified as follows: (1) the worship of inanimate

The Sin of Idolatry

objects, such as stones, trees, rivers, etc.; (2) of animals; (3) of the higher powers of nature, such as the sun, moon, stars; and the forces of nature, as air, fire, etc.; (4) hero-worship or of deceased ancestors; (5) *idealism*, or the worship of abstractions or mental qualities, such as justice.¹

What is an idol?

Throughout Scripture an idol is almost always a carved image, something crafted by human hand, made of wood or stone. An idol can be either a physical object that symbolizes a deity, or it can be an abstract concept such as greed or justice. A physical idol is merely the work of a craftsman (see Isa. 44:9-19). There no life in it (Ps. 115:1-8; Jer. 51:17; Hab. 2:18-20), nor can it deliver in times of trouble (Isa. 46:5-7). Ultimately, an idol is the thing or person we trust more than God to provide, protect, or guide us in life. Biblically, there is only one God, and He demands that His people worship Him (Ex. 20:3-6). The exclusive worship of God is for His glory and our benefit.

Can God's people engage in idolatry?

Yes. We can engage in idolatry. The record of Israel's history—with the exception of a few generations—is a record of their unfaithfulness to God as they worshipped pagan idols (Ex. 32:1-6), which at times included human sacrifice (Deut. 12:31; 18:10; 2 Ki. 21:6; Ezek. 16:20-21). The books of Judges, 1 & 2 Kings, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Hosea (just to name a few) all reveal

¹ Merrill F. Unger, ed. R.K. Harrison, "Idolatry" in *The New Unger's Bible Dictionary* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1988).

The Sin of Idolatry

Israel regularly committed idolatry, and this caused them to suffer greatly under God's discipline as He faithfully executed the cursing aspects of the Mosaic Covenant (Deut. 28:15-68).

Idolatry is dangerous because it is connected with the activity of demons (1 Cor. 10:19-20), who seek to steal God's glory and wreck our relationship with the Lord. Many of God's people have fallen into idolatry. Aaron led Israel into idol worship (Ex. 32:1-6). Solomon, by the end of his life, bowed down to idols (1 Ki. 11:6-10), and there is nothing in the biblical record that suggests Solomon ever turned back to the Lord. The apostle Paul addressed idolatry in his letter to the church at Corinth (1 Cor. 8:1-13; 10:14-33; 2 Cor. 6:16). The apostle John twice worshiped an angel and was rebuked for it (Rev. 19:10; 22:8-9). John knew the sinful proclivity of all Christians and I believe this is why he warns us, "Little children, guard yourselves from idols" (1 John 5:21).

Why do we commit idolatry?

Even though we are born again believers with a new heart (2 Cor. 5:17; Eph. 4:22-24; 1 Pet. 1:3, 23), we still possess a sin nature (Rom. 6:6; 13:14; Gal. 5:16-17, 19; Col. 3:9), and there is always a conflict within us (Rom. 7:19-25; Gal. 5:16-17). We commit idolatry because we seek to satisfy our sinful desires over God and His will. In American culture we tend to worship at the altar of self-interest, greed, personal achievement, personal security and self-satisfaction.

The Sin of Idolatry

How do we guard ourselves from idolatry?

First, **realize our hearts are sinful and bent toward idolatry.** It is the natural proclivity of mankind to worship things and people in the place of God. It comes very easy to us, even as Christians. Second, **be devoted to God.** Paul writes to Christians, stating, “present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, *which is your spiritual service of worship*” (Rom 12:1). This is a lifetime commitment to God in which we bring all of our life under His directive will. Third, **constantly be in God’s Word,** letting it guide our thinking and behavior. As Christians, we do not worship the Bible, but neither can we worship God without it (John 4:24). The Bible is God’s inerrant and enduring written revelation that tells us who He is and what He’s accomplished in time and space. The Bible is written in understandable language and made acceptable by the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 2:14-16; 2 Cor. 3:14-16; 4:3-4). Our walk with God depends on rightly understanding and applying Scripture (John 17:17; 1 Pet. 2:2; 2 Pet. 3:18). Fourth, **surround yourself with Christian friends** who will help you in your daily spiritual walk with the Lord. Our fellowship with other growing believers is paramount concerning our spiritual health and growth. The Bible is very clear when it states, “bad associations corrupt good morals” (1 Cor. 15:33). This is true in every way, and it helps us to have growing Christian friends who influence us to worship God and stay close to Him always. Fifth, **make time to worship the Lord daily,** singing to Him and praising Him for all His blessings (Ps. 95:2; 105:2; Eph. 5:18-21; Phil. 4:6; Col. 3:16-17; 1 Thess. 5:18). A heart that is satisfied with God will not seek lesser people or things to fill the void that occurs when we turn away from Him.

The Sin unto Death

The Sin unto Death

If anyone sees his [Christian] brother committing a sin that does not bring death, he should ask, and God will give life to him-- to those who commit sin that doesn't bring death. There is sin that brings death. I am not saying he should pray about that. (1 John 5:16 HCSB)

It happens from time to time that a Christian will see another Christian “committing a sin.” The apostle John distinguished two kinds of sin in the life of the Christian: the “sin that does not bring death” and the “sin that brings death” (1 John 5:16-17). The “sin that does not bring death” is any sin the Christian commits that does not warrant physical death from the hand of God, though it may bring divine discipline if the believer continues in it (Heb. 12:5-13). John does not specify which sin leads to death and which sin does not, as the punishment is finally determined by the Lord.

The sin that leads to death “denotes a sin habitually practiced by a believer, leading to God’s removing him from this life, but not taking away his salvation.”¹ It refers to the Christian who has become so sinfully rebellious that God disciplines him to point of death and takes him home to heaven. There are references in the Bible where God personally issued the death penalty for one or more of His

¹ Paul S. Karleen, *The Handbook to Bible Study: With a Guide to the Scofield Study System* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 359.

The Sin unto Death

erring children who had defied His authority. Examples include: Nadab and Abihu, who disobeyed the Lord in their priestly service (Lev. 10:1-3), Uzzah, when he touched the Ark (2 Sam. 6:1-7), Ananias and Sapphira who lied to the Holy Spirit (Acts 5:1-11), and some of the saints at Corinth who were abusing the Lord's Supper (1 Cor. 11:27-30).

Under the Mosaic Law, God willed that sin be punished, but only some sins were punishable by physical death. The sins punishable by death under the Mosaic Law included: intentional murder (Ex. 21:12-14; cf. Gen. 9:6), attacking or cursing a parent (Ex. 21:15), kidnapping (Ex. 21:16), habitual rebellion against God (Deut. 17:12), sacrificing to pagan gods (Ex. 22:20), cursing God (Lev. 24:15-16), working on the Sabbath (Ex. 35:2), being a false prophet and leading Israelites into idolatry (Deut. 13:1-5), religious human sacrifice (Lev. 20:2), the practice of divination, sorcery or witchcraft (Ex. 22:18; Deut. 18:9-14), adultery and premarital sex (Lev. 20:10-14; 21:9; Deut. 22:20-22), sex with an animal (Ex. 22:19; Lev. 20:15-16), incest (Lev. 20:11-12, 14), homosexuality (Lev. 18:22; 20:13), and the rape of a married woman (Deut. 22:25-27).

When it came to punishing the offender, sometimes God Himself executed the sentence (Lev. 10:1-3; 2 Sam. 6:1-7), and other times it was carried out by Israel's leaders (Ex. 32:19-28). In the New Testament, God does not call Christians to put anyone to death, but has delegated that authority solely to the governments of this world (Rom. 13:1-4), or He does it Himself (Acts 5:1-11; 1 Cor. 11:30; 1 John 5:16).

The Sin unto Death

Most sin does not lead to death

It appears from reading the Bible that most sin committed by believers does not result in the Lord putting them to death, although it may bring great punishment. It was a terrible sin when Aaron led the Israelites into idol worship (Ex. 32:1-6), but God did not call for Aaron's death. Samson slept with prostitutes (Judg. 16:1-4), and though he was disciplined, the Lord did not kill him. When David had an affair with Bathsheba and murdered her husband Uriah, it was a rotten sin that brought divine discipline. The Lord told David, "I will raise up evil against you from your own household" (2 Sam. 12:11); however, the Lord also told David, "you shall not die" (2 Sam. 12:13). It was evil when Solomon worshipped idols (1 Kings 11:1-10), but even here the Lord did not pronounce death for his sin. Peter argued with Jesus and tried to prevent Him from going to the cross (Matt. 16:21-22), and later publicly denied the Lord three times (Matt. 26:34-35; 69-75), but Peter was allowed to live. The apostle John twice worshiped an angel and was rebuked for it (Rev. 19:10; 22:8-9), but the Lord let him live and used him in ministry. God's grace and mercy is very prominent all throughout the Bible, and He repeatedly gives us ample opportunity to confess our sin and turn back to him. Thank God for His great grace.

God disciplines us for our good

As God's children, He expects us to live holy and righteous lives that conform to His will (Tit. 2:11-14; 1 Pet. 1:15-16). When we sin, we can be restored to fellowship with God by means of confession (1 John 1:9). If we fail to confess our sins, and choose a sinful lifestyle, we put

The Sin unto Death

ourselves in real danger of knowing God's discipline. The Scripture states, "For those whom the Lord loves He disciplines, and He scourges every son whom He receives" (Heb. 12:6). The wise believer accepts God's correction. David writes, "It is good for me that I was afflicted, that I may learn Your statutes" (Ps. 119:71), and later states, "I know, O LORD, that Your judgments are righteous, and that in faithfulness You have afflicted me" (Ps. 119:75). The foolish believer rejects God's correction, and if he perpetuates his sin, God may administer a final act of discipline and remove the believer from this world.

Many Christians rightfully suffer because of their sinful lifestyle (Heb. 12:5-11), and those who persist in their sin will eventually die by the hand of the Lord. Such death is the pinnacle of suffering in this life, but we should never conclude that it means suffering for eternity. All believers are eternally secure in Christ. At the moment of salvation, all believers are given eternal life and imputed with God's righteousness (John 3:16; 10:28; 2 Cor. 5:21; Phil. 3:9). They are forever kept by the power of God and cannot forfeit their salvation (John 10:29; Rom. 8:38-39). This means that when a believer dies—whatever the cause—he is guaranteed heaven as his eternal home. At his resurrection, the Christian is guaranteed a new body just the like body of our Lord Jesus (Phil. 3:20-21).

Summary

It is possible for a Christian to sin, and to sin as badly as any unbeliever. However, unlike the unbeliever, God disciplines His own (Heb. 12:5-11), and, if necessary, disciplines to the point of death (1 Cor. 11:30; 1 John 5:16). This need not be the case. The Christian is called to a life

The Sin unto Death

of holiness (1 Pet. 1:15-16), and this means learning to walk with God and do His will. Though we still possess a sin nature, the Christian knows victory because of his union with Christ (Rom. 6:6, 11-13).

The Sin unto Death

When God's People Behave Poorly

When God's People Behave Poorly

Do God's people ever behave poorly? Yes. There are times we behave poorly. As a Christian, there are times I behave poorly toward God by refusing to do His will (James 4:17). There are times I behave poorly toward other Christians by not modeling the love or grace or truth that should characterize a growing believer. And, there are times I behave poorly toward unbelievers by not modeling the love or grace or truth that reveals God to them. Though I have eternal life by faith in Christ (John 3:16; 10:28), and am among the Lord's righteous (2 Cor. 5:21; Phil. 3:9), I still sin (1 John 1:8, 10). As a believer, Solomon understood "there is not a righteous man on earth who *continually* does good and who never sins" (Eccl. 7:20). There are numerous biblical examples of believers who behaved poorly. Old Testament examples include:

1. Lot's daughters got him drunk and slept with him (Gen. 19:30-38).
2. Judah slept with Tamar, assuming she was a prostitute (Gen. 38:13-18).
3. Aaron led the Israelites in idol worship (Ex. 32:1-6).
4. Samson slept with prostitutes (Judg. 16:1-4).
5. David had an affair with Bathsheba and murdered her husband Uriah (2 Sam. 11:1-21).
6. Solomon ended his life worshipping idols (1 Kings 11:1-10).

New Testament examples include:

1. James and John (nicknamed *Boanerges*, or "Sons of Thunder"; Mark 3:17) wanted to call fire down

When God's People Behave Poorly

- from heaven to kill the residents of a Samaritan city (Luke 9:51-55).
2. The mother of James and John requested special treatment for her sons, that they might have a place of prominence seated on thrones to the right and left of Jesus (Matt. 20:20-21). This upset the other disciples (Matt. 20:24).
 3. The disciples tried to send away a woman who had come to Jesus for help with her demon possessed daughter (Matt. 15:21-23).
 4. The disciples tried to prevent a man from doing the Lord's work (Luke 9:49-50).
 5. The disciples argued amongst themselves as to who was greatest in the kingdom (Luke 9:46).
 6. Peter argued with Jesus and tried to prevent Him from going to the cross (Matt. 16:21-22). The Lord reproached Peter sharply (Matt. 16:23).
 7. Peter denied the Lord three times (Matt. 26:34-35; 69-75).
 8. Paul and Barnabas had a sharp disagreement that resulted in their separation as friends in ministry (Acts 15:36-39).
 9. The Christians at Corinth were guilty of quarrels (1 Cor. 1:11), jealousy and strife (1 Cor. 3:1-3), fornication (1 Cor. 5:1-2), selfishness and drunkenness (1 Cor. 11:21).
 10. Peter engaged in hypocrisy and was publicly rebuked by Paul (Gal. 2:11-14).
 11. The Apostle John was twice corrected for worshipping an angel (Rev. 19:10; 22:8-9). John knew the depravity of his own heart, and how easy it is to fall into idolatry, and he cautioned other Christians to "guard yourselves from idols" (1 John 5:21).

When God's People Behave Poorly

12. Five of the seven churches mentioned in Revelation 2 and 3 behaved poorly by not doing God's will, and the Lord Jesus reprimanded them.
 - a. Church at Ephesus – “you have left your first love” (Rev 2:4).
 - b. Church at Pergamum – “you have there some who hold the teaching of Balaam, who kept teaching Balak to put a stumbling block before the sons of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols and to commit *acts of immorality*” (Rev 2:14).
 - c. Church at Thyatira – “you tolerate the woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, and she teaches and leads My bond-servants astray so that they commit *acts of immorality* and eat things sacrificed to idols” (Rev 2:20).
 - d. Church at Sardis – “I have not found your deeds completed in the sight of My God” (Rev 3:2).
 - e. Church at Laodicea – “I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot; I wish that you were cold or hot” (Rev 3:15).

Though there are numerous examples of believers, both in the Old and New Testament, who behaved poorly toward God, other believers, and unbelievers, this is never what God expects from us. As His children, God calls us to live holy and righteous lives (Tit. 2:11-14), to manifest love (1 Thess. 4:9), grace (Eph. 4:29), and truth to others (Eph. 4:15). When we fail, we should humbly confess our sins and move on (1 John 1:9), as we keep striving to know God and walk in His will (2 Tim. 3:16-17; 1 Pet. 2:2; 2 Pet. 3:18).

When God's People Behave Poorly

The Doctrine of Simultaneity

The Doctrine of Simultaneity

The Protestant Reformer, Martin Luther, coined the Latin phrase *simul iustus et peccator*, which translates as, *simultaneously righteous and a sinner*. Luther correctly understood the biblical teaching that we are righteous in God's sight because of the righteousness of Christ imputed to us at salvation and at the same time we continue to possess a sin nature and practice sin. This is based on four biblical truths:

We are all born with a sin nature

Every person born into this world—with the exception of Jesus—is a sinner. We are sinners because *Adam's original sin is imputed to us* (Ps. 51:5; Rom. 5:12, 19; 1 Cor. 15:21-22), we are *born with a sinful nature* which urges us to sin (Rom. 7:14-25; Gal. 5:17), and *we choose to sin* when we yield to temptation (Jas. 1:14-15). Sin is anything that is contrary to the holy character of God. Sin permeates every aspect of our being and renders us separated from God and helpless to save ourselves (Rom. 5:6-10; 6:23; Eph. 2:1-3).

God has provided for our salvation

The good news of the gospel is that Jesus took our sin upon Himself and bore the punishment that rightfully belongs to us (1 Cor. 1:18, 21; 15:3-4; Col. 2:13-14; 1 Pet. 2:24). This is substitutionary atonement, in which Jesus died in our place, “the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God” (1 Pet. 3:18; cf. Rom. 5:6-10). Jesus paid the redemption price for our sins (Mark 10:45), and calls us

The Doctrine of Simultaneity

into fellowship with Him (Acts 26:18; Col. 1:13-14). Salvation comes to us only as a free gift from God (Eph. 2:8-9; Tit. 3:5), “being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus” (Rom 3:24). God is completely satisfied with the death of Christ, who “is the propitiation [ἵλασμός *hilasmos* – satisfaction] for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for *those of the whole world*” (1 John 2:2; cf. Rom. 3:25; 1 John 4:10). At the cross, God judged our sin as His righteousness requires and provides us salvation as His love desires.

We receive a new nature at salvation

At the moment we place our faith in Jesus Christ as our Savior we are born again (John 3:3; 1 Pet. 1:3, 23), and we acquire a new nature that desires to do God’s will (Rom. 7:21-23; 2 Cor. 5:17; Eph. 4:22; Col. 3:9-10; 1 John 2:29; 3:9). In addition, our identification with Adam is cancelled and we are immediately united with Christ (Rom. 5:14-18; 1 Cor. 15:22), we are indwelt with God the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 6:19-20; Eph. 1:13-14), forgiven all our sins (Eph. 1:7; Col. 1:14), given eternal life (John 3:16; 10:27-28), bestowed with God’s own righteousness (Rom. 5:17; 2 Cor. 5:21; Phil. 3:9), and have the power to live righteously (Rom. 6:1-13; Tit. 2:11-14).

Christians possess a sin nature after salvation

Though we have our new nature in Christ at the moment of salvation, we continue to possess our sinful nature, and this produces internal conflict throughout our Christian life (Rom. 6:6; 7:14-25; 13:14; Col. 3:9; Gal. 5:16-17). This reality explains why Paul tells the Christians at Rome to “put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and

The Doctrine of Simultaneity

make no provision for the flesh in regard to its lusts” (Rom 13:14; cf. Rom. 6:6; Col. 3:9), and to the Christians at Galatia to “walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh” (Gal. 5:16). Though we struggle with sin, we are assured that “there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus” (Rom. 8:1), for we are “the righteousness of God in Him” (2 Cor. 5:21; cf. Rom. 5:17; Phil. 3:9). Both are true. We are perfectly righteous in God’s sight because of the righteousness of Christ imputed to us, and we continue to possess a sin nature and commit sin.

The person who has thus received the gift of faith Luther described as “at once righteous and a sinner” (*simul iustus et peccator*). Formerly he had understood this term in the Augustinian sense of “partly” a sinner and “partly” righteous. ...Now, however, while retaining the paradox of simultaneity, he sharpened each of the clashing concepts into a sovereign, total realm. Luther continued to use *simul iustus et peccator* after 1518-19, but he did so in the sense of *semper* (always) *iustus et peccator*. **The believer is not only both righteous and sinful at the same time but is also always or completely both righteous and sinful at the same time** [emphasis added]. What does this mean? With respect to our fallen human condition, we are, and always will be in this life, sinners. However for believers life in this world is no longer a period of doubtful candidacy for God’s acceptance. In a sense we have already been before God’s judgment seat and have been acquitted on

The Doctrine of Simultaneity

account of Christ. Hence we are also always righteous.¹

Summary

So then, as Christians, we are simultaneously righteous and sinners. We are righteous in God's eyes because of the righteousness of Christ that is imputed to us as a free gift (Rom. 5:17; 2 Cor. 5:21; Phil. 3:9). And, we continue to possess a sin nature that continually causes internal temptation and conflict (Rom. 6:6; 7:14-25; 13:14; Col. 3:9; Gal. 5:16-17, 19). Though the power of the sin nature is broken (Rom. 6:11-14), the presence of the sin nature is never removed from us until God takes us from this world and gives us a new body like the body of Jesus (Phil. 3:20-21).

¹ Timothy George, *Theology of the Reformers* (Nashville, Tenn., Broadman and Holman publishers, 2013), 72.

A Christian View of Death

A Christian View of Death

Once, when I was working in jail ministry, I met a Christian man who told me about his older brother's death. The incident, he said, had occurred several years earlier. He and his brother were drinking and arguing one afternoon when a fist fight erupted and the older brother fell backwards onto a metal pipe that pierced his heart. The man did all he could to save his brother, but the wound was fatal. His brother, whom he loved, was suddenly gone, and for years he carried the image of his brother's lifeless body, held in his blood-soaked hands. Tears rolled down his face as he recalled the event. Over time he was able to resolve some of his grief, but while talking with me, he expressed a lingering concern about his brother's eternal destiny. He was not sure if his brother would spend eternity in heaven or hell. Though his brother claimed to be a Christian, and family and friends spoke well of him at the funeral, the reality was that his brother's life never reflected the virtues of Christ. Though I could not offer any assurance about his brother's eternal destiny, I encouraged him to live his life in such a way that when he died, he would not leave his loved ones with any question about the place of Christ in his own life.

Often we do not know how or when we will die, and if the Lord tarries in His return, we will all face death, in some form or another. Death is an uncomfortable subject, but for those who trust in the Lord, it need not be. God knows how frail we are, "He is mindful that we are *but dust*" (Ps. 103:14). David courageously asked the Lord, "Make me to know my end and what is the extent of my days; let me know how transient I am. Behold, You have

A Christian View of Death

made my days short in length, and my lifetime as nothing in Your sight; surely every man at his best is a mere breath” (Ps. 39:4-5). Job too perceived the brevity of his life and declared, “I will not live forever...for my days are *but* a breath” (Job 7:16), and James wrote, “you are *just* a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away” (Jam. 4:14b). Leaving this world is inevitable; where we spend eternity is optional. God loves us and sent His Son into the world that He would provide eternal life for us.

For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life. For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him. (John 3:16-17)

Death was introduced into God’s creation when the first human, Adam, sinned against God. Adam’s sin immediately brought spiritual death (Gen. 2:15-17; 3:1-8), and later, physical death (Gen. 5:5). Though Adam was made spiritually alive again (Gen. 3:21), his single sin introduced death, in every form, into the world (Rom. 5:12-14; 1 Cor. 15:21-22). The universe itself groans, being effected by sin, waiting for its redemption (Rom. 8:20-22; cf. 2 Pet. 3:13; Rev. 21:1). **Death means separation.** Three major kinds of death are mentioned in Scripture:

1. **Spiritual death**, which is separation from God in time. Spiritually dead people continue to live until they die physically (Gen. 2:16-17; 3:1-8; 5:5; Eph. 2:1; Col. 2:13).
2. **Physical death**, which is the separation of the soul from the body (Eccl. 12:7; 2 Cor. 5:8). According

A Christian View of Death

to Scripture, “death is not the end of human existence, but a change of place or conditions in which conscious existence continues.”¹

3. **Eternal death** (biblically called the “second death”), which is the perpetuation of physical and spiritual death into eternity (Rev. 20:11-15).

All persons born into this world are physically alive, but spiritually dead, separated from God, because of Adam’s sin. The Bible reveals, “through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned [when Adam sinned]” (Rom. 5:12), and “in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive” (1 Cor. 15:22). Though we are all dead in Adam, God offers new life when we turn to Christ as Savior, reconciling us to Himself through the death of His Son (Rom. 5:1-2). Adam’s sin brought death, and Christ’s death brings life. In Adam I am guilty, in Christ I am righteous.

For the Christian, death is not the final victor in eternity. God created the soul to be forever united with the body. Therefore, God will resurrect each body that has died and will reunite it with each human soul. Every person, whether saved or unsaved, will receive a resurrection body that will live forever. “For the saved it involves eternal life or endless union and fellowship with God. For the unsaved it involves eternal existence in

¹ E. McChesney, “Death”, in *The New Unger’s Bible Dictionary*, ed. Merrill F. Unger and R.K. Harrison, Rev. and updated ed. (Chicago: Moody Press, 1988).

A Christian View of Death

separation from God.”² Only those who are *born again*—by the Spirit of God—have eternal life and will spend forever in heaven (1 Pet. 1:3, 23). Eternal life is received by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone (John 3:16; 14:6; Acts 4:12; Gal. 2:16; Eph. 2:8-9; Tit. 3:5). We receive eternal life by trusting in the Lord Jesus Christ as our Savior, believing the gospel that He “died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures” (1 Cor. 15:3-4). Eternal life “involves the endless continuance and perfection of blessedness and communion with God entered upon by the saved on the earth (cf. John 3:15–16; 6:40; 17:3; Rom. 2:7).”³ When the believer dies, he immediately goes into the presence of God. “Jesus promised the repentant thief on the cross that He would see paradise the very day of his death (Luke 23:43). Paul teaches that, for believers, being absent from the body means being present with Christ (2 Cor. 5:8).”⁴

Scripture reveals God is sovereign over all His creation, either causing or permitting whatsoever comes to pass (see God’s Providence). From eternity past, God knows all things, and because He is sovereign, there are no accidental people or events in history. God creates life (Gen. 2:7; Job 1:21; Ps. 100:3; Acts 17:24-25; Rev. 11:11)

² Merrill F. Unger, “Life”, in *The New Unger’s Bible Dictionary*, ed. R.K. Harrison, Rev. and updated ed. (Chicago: Moody Press, 1988).

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ Russell D. Moore, “Death”, in *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, ed. Chad Brand, Charles Draper, Archie England et al. (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2003), 406.

A Christian View of Death

and controls death (Gen. 2:16-17; 3:1-8; 6:17; 1 Sam. 2:6; 2 Kings 5:7; Luke 12:20; Rev. 1:18). The Lord declares, “See now that I, I am He, and there is no god besides Me; It is I who put to death and give life. I have wounded and it is I who heal” (Deut. 32:39). God holds final control over our life, from beginning to end, and preordains our days on the earth. David writes, “In Your book were all written the days that were ordained *for me*, when as yet there was not one of them” (Ps. 139:16). God’s sovereign control over life and death includes our responsible choices as volitional creatures. He desires that we think and act in conformity with His revealed will, but in many cases He permits us to act, either good or bad, and to reap the consequences of our choices. At physical death, all of life’s decisions are fixed for eternity, and what we do with Christ determines our eternal destiny (John 3:16-18; 1 Cor. 15:3-4; Eph. 2:8-9). It has been said that procrastination is the thief of time, and when one procrastinates about the gospel, it becomes the thief of souls. I encourage you not to delay concerning the gospel message, and to trust Christ as Savior today.

What about Children?

The command to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ for salvation presupposes intelligence and the ability to exercise one’s volition. Children and those who are mentally disabled lack the intellectual and volitional capacity to make a decision for or against Christ; therefore, they are not made accountable for sin.

In the Bible, infants, little children, and others who cannot believe are neither told to believe nor expected to do so. They are not classified as wicked evildoers and rejecters of God’s grace. It is

A Christian View of Death

always adults who are addressed, either directly or indirectly, regarding these matters. Because the Bible has so much to say about those who cannot believe and yet says nothing about their being eternally separated from God because of their inability, we conclude that they have heaven as their home. They die safely in the arms of Jesus.⁵

An often cited biblical precedent on this matter is found in the life of King David who lost a newborn son as a result of his adulterous affair with Bathsheba and the murder of her husband Uriah. David was guilty of horrible sin, but he had a sensitive heart and was very concerned for his child. David said:

While the child was *still* alive, I fasted and wept; for I said, ‘Who knows, the LORD may be gracious to me, that the child may live.’ “But now he has died; why should I fast? Can I bring him back again? I will go to him, but he will not return to me. (2 Sam. 12:22-23)

While the child was alive, David prayed to God to be gracious “that the child may live.” However, after the child died, David expressed optimism by saying “I will go to him, but he will not return to me.” David was thinking of heaven, where he knew his infant son had gone.

Life after death was a certainty for David. That he would be with his son again in the future was his firm belief. He never doubted that fact for a

⁵ Robert P. Lightner, *Safe in the Arms of Jesus* (Grand Rapids, Mich., Kregel Publications, 2000), 15-16.

A Christian View of Death

moment. David was rightly related to the Lord, and he did not question that he would spend eternity with Him. Nor did he have any doubt that his infant son, taken in death before he could decide for or against his father's God, would be there also.⁶

⁶ Ibid., 55.

A Christian View of Death

Suffering and Depression

Suffering and Depression¹

It was early January and I was dining after dark with friends when I heard faint cries coming from outside. Standing and looking out the nearby window, I saw a young man who looked to be in his early twenties, stagger down the sidewalk and collapse about ten feet from the building. I rushed outside and knelt on the ground next to him while others inside called for medical help (which took about five minutes to arrive). He lay on the cold asphalt, shivering and sobbing, and appeared to be more in emotional distress than physical pain. He looked at me, a total stranger, and through his tears said he was on the verge of losing his girlfriend and newborn baby and that his life had been ruined by bad choices and the use of cocaine and other drugs. After saying these things he turned his head and cried uncontrollably. His life had not always been marked by bad choices. Phantom memories surfaced and he spoke of a Christian childhood when Christ was Lord of his life and all his friends were wholesome believers. Somewhere in his teenage years he had turned away from the Lord and the suffering of bad choices and worldly friends helped bring about his present sorrow. I put my hand on his shoulder and prayed quietly as I sat next to him. He cried out to the Lord, and not knowing what to say, he started praying the Lord's Prayer: "Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be Thy name..." (Matt. 6:9, KJV). I verbally joined him in his prayer so that he would not feel alone, but would know he was in the

¹ This article is taken from my book, *Suffering: A Biblical Consideration*, 1-7.

Suffering and Depression

presence of a caring Christian. He heard me praying with him, and through teary eyes stared for a moment. For a brief instant we connected, but a minute later an ambulance pulled into the motel parking lot and I was moved aside so they could perform their necessary service. Apparently he had been using harmful illegal drugs and was in need of medical attention. The young man called out to me as he was put on the stretcher and placed in the ambulance and I could only watch and pray for him as he was taken away. I never saw him again, though I've prayed for him many times.

I was marked by that brief encounter. That young man was at a place of personal brokenness when the paths of our lives crossed. There seemed to be sorrow and repentance on his lips. It mattered little to me that much of his pain was self-induced, but only that he was crying out to the Lord for help. To turn away from him at such a moment would betray a spiritual poverty and sickness within my own soul. More so, it would ignore the sovereign hand of God who creates such opportunities for us to show grace and love to others. A year earlier I was in a similar place of personal brokenness, for my life had been ruined by many bad choices and I knew what it meant to have others praying for me and showing grace and love when I needed it most.

Looking into Scripture, we find the greatest examples of suffering anywhere. Job and Jeremiah were two men who suffered greatly. Both were sensitive men who knew depression as a result of their suffering, and as we read about their lives we can cry with them. In the midst of his sadness Job said, "why then hast Thou brought me out of the womb? Would that I had died and no eye had

Suffering and Depression

seen me! I should have been as though I had not been, carried from womb to tomb” (Job 10:18-19). Because of his sorrow, Job saw his life as a “land of darkness and deep shadow; the land of utter gloom as darkness itself, of deep shadow without order” (Job 10:21-22a). During his time of sadness, the prophet Jeremiah wished that his “mother would have been [his] grave, and her womb ever pregnant” and in his great anguish went on to ask, “why did I ever come forth from the womb to look on trouble and sorrow, so that my days have been spent in shame?” (Jer. 20:17-18).

What shall we say to Job and Jeremiah? Shall we ask them to be silent and not use such language because it makes us feel uncomfortable? Shall we be callous and accuse them of hidden sin or not having enough faith? Shall we fault them because they are not expressing joy in the midst of their sorrow? There is a joy to be had in life, but let’s not rob these godly men of their sorrow, or turn away from them for expressing themselves with such grief-laden language because it makes us feel uncomfortable. Let’s not turn away from them for at least two reasons:

1. Because their response to suffering reveals their humanness. Job and Jeremiah were real people living in a real world who were touched by real circumstances. Though most of us will never know the depth of suffering and sorrow that Job and Jeremiah knew in their lifetime, we can identify with their pain and cry with them because we understand in a smaller way what it means to suffer, and this is our connection with them. Suffering connects us all together.

Suffering and Depression

2. Because despair was not their only perspective on life. Job and Jeremiah also had the divine perspective on life and at times spoke words of truth and hope, and this gives us truth and hope as well. Though they suffered in the furnace of affliction, they proved God and His Word to be reliable and more than sufficient to sustain them. During and after their time of suffering they spoke words of praise to the One in whom they had placed all their confidence. Worshipping God as the One who sustains and gives us hope in the midst of our trials is what binds us together with other believers, even those who lived long ago in a foreign land and who spoke a different language. God and His Word connect believers together.

Job was a righteous man who loved the Lord and turned away from evil (Job. 1:1-5). In one day Job was confronted with the sudden death of all his sons and daughters, the destruction of his business, and the loss of his personal health (Job 1:6-19; 2:1-8). Though he could have cursed God as his wife suggested (Job. 2:9), Job kept his faith and continued to trust the Lord (Job 1:20-22; 2:10). In the midst of grief Job said:

As for me, I know that my Redeemer lives, and at the last He will take His stand on the earth. Even after my skin is destroyed, yet from my flesh I shall see God; whom I myself shall behold, and whom my eyes shall see and not another. My heart faints within me. (Job 19:25-27)

Jeremiah had witnessed the destruction of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar and his Babylonian army. The city had

Suffering and Depression

been burned, tens of thousands of men and woman put to death, and many taken away into slavery to Babylon as Jeremiah watched. One can see why he is often referred to as the weeping prophet (cf. Jer. 9:1; 13:17; 14:17). Yet, even after witnessing Jerusalem's destruction and enduring personal persecution, Jeremiah stated:

This I recall to my mind, therefore I have hope. The LORD's lovingkindnesses indeed never cease, for His compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is Thy faithfulness. "The LORD is my portion," says my soul, therefore I have hope in Him. (Lam. 3:21-24)

Other men in Scripture such as David, Elijah, Peter and Paul all knew suffering and sorrow, yet expressed words of hope and faith in God. Of course, no one knew suffering more than the Lord Jesus Christ, who throughout His life was "despised and forsaken of men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief" (Isa. 53:3). During the time of His public ministry, Jesus knew He would suffer and die upon the cross, and He declared, "the Son of Man must suffer many things, and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised up on the third day" (Luke 9:22). And just hours before His crucifixion, Jesus "began to be grieved and distressed" (Matt. 26:37), telling a few of His disciples, "My soul is deeply grieved, to the point of death" (Matt. 26:38). In spite of His personal pain, Jesus was willing to suffer and die for the benefit of the salvation of others. The Scripture declares that "as a result of the anguish of His soul, He will see *it and* be satisfied; by His knowledge the Righteous One, My Servant, will justify the many, as He will bear their iniquities" (Isa. 53:11). The death of Christ had

Suffering and Depression

meaning, because God's righteousness was satisfied and others were blessed to enjoy the gift of eternal life (Rom. 3:21-26).

Suffering touches us all. It moves and shapes us in ways we never imagine. It breaks us down and builds us up, but it never leaves us where it finds us. In Scripture we learn that God's power is magnified in our weaknesses and that suffering reveals our true state as weak creatures who need the Lord in our lives for strength and guidance (2 Cor. 12:7-10). As we develop spiritually, we learn to keep our eyes more and more on heaven, knowing that ultimate relief from suffering will only come when the Lord returns and establishes righteousness on the earth (Rev. 20-22). There is much Scripture on the subject of suffering and there is hope and strength in God for those who turn to Him in the midst of life's sorrows.

The Frailty of Man

The Frailty of Man

God knows the frailty of every man, “He Himself knows our frame; He is mindful that we are *but* dust” (Ps. 103:14). It was from courage that David asked the Lord, “make me to know my end and what is the extent of my days; let me know how transient I am. Behold, You have made my days *as* handbreadths, and my lifetime as nothing in Your sight; surely every man at his best is a mere breath” (Ps. 39:4-5). Job too perceived the brevity of his life and declared, “I will not live forever...for my days are *but* a breath” (Job 7:16), and James wrote, “you are *just* a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away” (Jam. 4:14b).

It is often true that when we’re young we do not think about the brevity of life, but as time advances we’re prone to reflect on such things. Wisdom calls us to live every moment in the light of eternity, for at any instant God may pluck us from this world and bring us into His presence. God alone holds the days of our lives, and we say with David, “in Your book were all written the days that were ordained *for me*, when as yet there was not one of them” (Ps. 139:16).

It’s a sign of spiritual maturity when a believer lives in the reality of his own mortality and adopts a healthy biblical perspective on God and eternity. Such a believer does not concern himself with the daily affairs of this world, except how he might please the Lord and show love to others (2 Cor. 5:9; 1 Thess. 4:9). The growing Christian realizes there is no lasting value in the accumulation of wealth or shiny trinkets, nice homes or expensive cars, as

The Frailty of Man

these are only fuel for the great fire (2 Pet. 3:10-12; Rev. 21:1). This does not mean the believer cannot enjoy wealth if God gives it; certainly he can (Eccl. 3:12-13; 5:19-20; 9:9). Rather, the mature believer does not hold tightly to the things of this world, but walks in the truth that ***one life will soon be past, and only what's done for Christ will last***. It is on God and heaven that the believer must focus his thoughts and energy, for “he who confesses that there is nothing solid or stable on the earth, and yet firmly retains his hope in God, undoubtedly contemplates a happiness reserved for him elsewhere.”¹

¹ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, II (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 1997) chapter x, section 15.

The Frailty of Man

The Vanity of Man as Mortal

Teach me the measure of my days,
Thou Maker of my frame;
I would survey life's narrow space,
And learn how frail I am.

A span is all that we can boast,
An inch or two of time;
Man is but vanity and dust
In all his flower and prime.

See the vain race of mortals move
Like shadows o'er the plain;
They rage and strive, desire and love,
But all the noise is vain.

Some walk in honor's gaudy show,
Some dig for golden ore;
They toil for heirs, they know not who,
And straight are seen no more.

What should I wish or wait for, then,
From creatures earth and dust?
They make our expectations vain,
And disappoint our trust.

Now I forbid my carnal hope,
My fond desires recall;
I give my mortal interest up,
And make my God my all.

Isaac Watts

The Frailty of Man

The House of Mourning

The House of Mourning

It is better to go to a house of mourning than to go to a house of feasting, because that is the end of every man, and the living takes *it* to heart. Sorrow is better than laughter, for when a face is sad a heart may be happy. The mind of the wise is in the house of mourning, while the mind of fools is in the house of pleasure. (Eccl. 7:2-4, NASB)

When I was younger—nearly 30 years ago—I spent a lot of time partying. Feasting and laughter was all I wanted. I never spent a day mourning for anyone or anything, but then I never thought about the end of life either. Solomon says, “The mind of the wise is in the house of mourning, while the mind of fools is in the house of pleasure” (Eccl. 7:4). “The fool is one who thinks only of the present; he lives for the hour. He shuns places of sadness and death, because they contradict his lifestyle.”¹ I was a fool.

There is a place for laughter and joy and celebration, and there is a place for weeping and mourning. “Laughter can be like medicine that heals the broken heart, but sorrow can be like nourishing food that strengthens the inner person. It takes both for a balanced life, but few

¹ James E. Smith, *The Wisdom Literature and Psalms*, Old Testament Survey Series (Joplin, MO: College Press Pub. Co., 1996), Eccl. 7:2–4.

The House of Mourning

people realize this.”² Earlier in the book of Ecclesiastes, Solomon declared there’s “a time to weep and a time to laugh; a time to mourn and a time to dance” (Eccl. 3:4). The Bible clearly recognizes both. However, when comparing mourning and feasting, with sorrow and laughter, Solomon says, “it is better to go to a house of mourning than to go to a house of feasting” (Eccl. 7:2), and “sorrow is better than laughter” (Eccl. 7:3).

When a man enters the house of mourning he is faced with the reality that someday he will die, and this experience can be healthy, when viewed from the divine perspective. Solomon wants us to know that death is “the end of every man, and the living takes *it* to heart” (Eccl. 7:2). “Such a perspective forces the individual to face the reality of death toward which all life inevitably points.”³ Not only does the house of mourning make us think about the day of our death, but it can also draw our thoughts toward heaven and make us think about God and where we will spend eternity. When a man is on his deathbed, he does not ask for a book on science, or a book on history, or a book on mathematics, rather he asks for THE BOOK, because he knows his days are near. May the fear of the Lord “teach us to consider our mortality, so that we might live wisely” (Ps. 90:12, NET).

² Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Satisfied*, “Be” Commentary Series (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1996), 19.

³ Barry C. Davis, “Ecclesiastes 12:1-8—Death, an Impetus for Life” *Bibliotheca Sacra*, 148 (1991): 301.

The House of Mourning

I walked a mile with Pleasure;
She chattered all the way,
But left me none the wiser
For all she had to say
I walked a mile with Sorrow,
And not a word said she;
But oh, the things I learned from her
When Sorrow walked with me!

—*Robert Browning Hamilton*

The House of Mourning

I Am a Saint

I Am a Saint

I am a saint. It's true. The Bible declares it. At the moment I believed in Jesus as my Savior I became *Saint Steven*. Feel free to call me that next time you see me. The word *saint*, as it appears in the New Testament, is a translation of the Greek noun ἅγιος *hagios*, which basically means *holy* or *sacred*. Paul uses the term saints in his letters as a synonym for Christians (Rom. 1:7; 1 Cor. 1:2; Eph. 1:1; 6:18; Phil. 1:1; 4:21-22; Col. 1:2). The Greek verb ἀγιάζω *hagiazō* is used with reference to saints who have been *consecrated*, *sanctified*, or *set apart to God* by means of the work of Christ. The writer to the Hebrews declares, "For by one offering He has perfected for all time those who are sanctified" (Heb. 10:14; cf. 1 Cor. 6:11; Heb. 13:12). Paul writes to the Christians at Corinth and regards them as "sanctified in Christ Jesus" (1 Cor. 1:2). "In this sense, all believers are called "saints," irrespective of their spiritual attainments (Rom. 1:7; 1 Cor. 1:2; Eph. 1:1; Phil. 1:1; Col. 1:2). In the case of the Corinthians, their unsaintly character is especially evident (1 Cor. 3:1-4; 5:1f.; 6:1; 11:17-22). The Hebrew believers were saints, yet immature (Heb. 2:11; 3:1; 5:11-14)."¹ Saints are not special Christians, but those who are made righteous because of the work of Christ applied to their lives. "The term is applied to all believers. The believer can approach God only because he or she has obtained a righteous standing or

¹ Henry Clarence Thiessen and Vernon D. Doerksen, *Lectures in Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1979), 288.

I Am a Saint

position on the basis of Christ's work by means of faith."²
Merrill F. Unger writes:

The NT refutes the idea of a special class of "saints." Although it is true that *in experience* some believers are more "holy" than others, yet in their position before God all believers are "sanctified," i.e., saints by virtue of what they are "in Christ." The Christian's perfect *position* (Rom. 6:1–10) is made a comfortable *experience* of Christ by faith (v. 11); "considering" themselves to be what they are in their person before God, they became such in their everyday experience. The more one's experience conforms to one's position, the more practical holiness is manifested in the child of God (saint).³

Positional sainthood in Christ precedes practical sainthood in life. God, who made me holy by virtue of my union with Christ, also calls for me to be holy in my behavior. The apostle Peter writes, "like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all *your* behavior" (1 Pet. 1:15). However, my status as a saint is based on my *new birth* and union with Christ and not any good works I produce. This is true of all "the saints in Christ Jesus" (Phi 1:1; cf. 4:21). As a comparison, my American citizenship is based on my birth, not my behavior. I was born an America citizen, and I may be a good citizen or a bad

² Harold Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, Mich., Baker Book House, 2002), 139-140.

³ Merrill F. Unger, "Saints" In , in *The New Unger's Bible Dictionary*, ed. R.K. Harrison, Rev. and updated ed. (Chicago: Moody Press, 1988).

I Am a Saint

citizen, but my behavior does not change my status as an American. Likewise, my spiritual birth is the basis for my sainthood, and I may be a good saint or a bad saint, but my behavior does not change my status as a saint. I do not lose my status as a saint when I sin any more than I lose my status as an American when I break a law. I may suffer punishment for my sin, but that's a different matter.

Saints are sinners. It's a fact. That's just another way of saying Christians commit sin. Take for example the Christians living in the ancient city of Corinth. The apostle Paul opens his letter, addressing them as "the church of God which is at Corinth, to those who have been sanctified [ἁγιάζω *hagiazō*] in Christ Jesus, saints [ἅγιος *hagios*] by calling" (1 Cor. 1:2). As you read through Paul's letter to the saints at Corinth, you realize many of these saints are spiritual babies who have yet to grow up and become mature in their walk with the Lord. Paul chastises them for their quarrels (1 Cor. 1:11), jealousy and strife (1 Cor. 3:1-3), fornication (1 Cor. 5:1-2), and selfishness and drunkenness (1 Cor. 11:21). Their behavior was what we might expect to see at a local bar rather than the local church. The saints in Corinth were certainly committing acts of sin, but that did not destroy their status as saints. Some people think saints are sinless, but that's a false idea. They did not get this from the Bible. Scripture teaches "there is not a righteous man on earth who *continually* does good and who never sins" (Eccl. 7:20). Harold Hoehner writes about sinning saints:

When it [*hagios*] is used substantively, it is used of those who are called saints (1 Cor. 1:2) who may have practiced unholy things (5:1). In fact, the saints of Ephesus were admonished to stop

I Am a Saint

practicing the lifestyle of those who were not saints (Eph. 4:25-32). The reason that saints are to abstain from the sins of the ungodly is because their bodies are the temples of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 6:15-20) and because of their position as saints (Eph. 5:3), not because they are inherently holy in themselves. The idea, then, is that they had the position of saints and thus were to act saintly. They obtained this position because they had appropriated Christ's work to their lives (1 Cor. 6:11) rather than gained it by acting saintly.⁴

Christians are saints, even when they sin. They are saints, not because they live saintly lives, but because the work of Christ has been appropriated to them, and they've been set apart to God by the work of the Holy Spirit. But let me state very clearly: **God always deals with his sinning children.** He desires to guide us from infancy to adulthood; much like a loving parent guides their own children. This means He disciplines us for our spiritual growth (Heb. 12:5-11). This is just a part of the Christian life. I know some Christians who shy away from listening to any talk about discipline or suffering for spiritual growth, but they are the ones who have been stuck in spiritual infancy all their lives. Saints do sin, and God does discipline. The Scripture states, "For those whom the Lord loves He disciplines, and He scourges every son whom He receives" (Heb. 12:6). The wise believer accepts God's correction. David writes, "It is good for me that I was afflicted, that I may learn Your statutes" (Ps. 119:71).

⁴ Harold Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, Mich., Baker Book House, 2002), 139-140.

I Am a Saint

David goes on to say, “I know, O LORD, that Your judgments are righteous, and that in faithfulness You have afflicted me” (Ps. 119:75). The wise saint loves the Lord and wants to grow spiritually.

I Am a Saint

Restoring Broken Fellowship with God

This is the message we have heard from Him and announce to you, that God is Light [i.e. purity and holiness; cf. John 3:19–21; 8:12; 12:35–36], and in Him there is no darkness at all [i.e. no sin; cf. John 3:19; 1 John 2:8–11]. ⁶ If we say that we have fellowship with Him and *yet* walk in the darkness [i.e. commit sin], we lie and do not practice the truth; ⁷ but if we walk in the Light as He Himself is in the Light, we have fellowship with one another [between God and the Christian], and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin. ⁸ If we say that we have no sin [as believers] we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us. ⁹ If we confess our sins [i.e. agree with God about our sin], He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. ¹⁰ If we say that we have not sinned [as God’s Word declares], we make Him a liar and His word is not in us. (1 John 1:5-10)

What person can say, “I have cleansed my heart, I am pure from my sin”? (Prov. 20:9). No one is ever free from sin in this life, “Indeed, there is not a righteous man on earth who *continually* does good and who never sins” (Eccl. 7:20). Sin (from the Hebrew חַטָּא *chata* or the Greek ἁμαρτία *hamartia*) means to fall away or miss the mark of God’s intended will. Sin is failure to do God’s will, and both unbelievers and believers commit sin. “The sinfulness of sin lies in the fact that it is against God, even when the

Restoring Broken Fellowship with God

wrong we do is to others or ourselves (Gen. 39:9; Ps. 51:4).”¹ The Bible teaches everyone is a sinner (Rom. 3:9). We are sinners *because of our relationship to Adam* (Rom. 5:12, 19; 1 Cor. 15:21-22), we are sinners *by nature*, born with a rebellious heart (Rom. 7:14-25; Gal. 5:17), and we are sinners *by choice* every time we yield to temptation (Jas. 1:14-15).

At the moment of faith in Christ, all sins (past, present, and future) are forgiven (Eph. 1:7; Col. 2:13), and the believer’s relationship to Adam is terminated as the Christian begins a new identity *in Christ* (Eph. 2:5-6). At the moment of the new birth, the believer is completely justified in God’s sight, and this is by grace, because Christ died in our place and bore the penalty that rightfully belongs to us (Mark 10:45; Rom. 5:6-10; 1 Cor. 15:3-4; 2 Cor. 5:21; 1 Pet. 3:18). Believers stand acceptable before God, not because of any righteousness of our own based on good works (Eph. 2:8-9; Tit. 3:5), but because of the righteousness of Christ that has been imputed to us by faith (Rom. 4:1-5), “the righteousness which *comes* from God on the basis of faith” (Phil. 3:9). As Christians, we are “justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus” (Rom 3:24). God made Christ “who knew no sin *to be* sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him” (2 Cor. 5:21). Christ died a death He did not deserve, that we might have a life and enjoy spiritual riches we could never earn (Rom. 5:5-10; Eph. 2:1-6). Salvation is truly a gift from God.

¹ Merrill F. Unger and E. McChesney, "Sin" In , in *The New Unger's Bible Dictionary*, ed. R.K. Harrison, Rev. and updated ed. (Chicago: Moody Press, 1988).

Restoring Broken Fellowship with God

From the moment of my spiritual birth until I leave this world for heaven, I am *in Christ* and all my sins are forgiven (Eph. 2:5-6; Col. 2:13). In addition, I have a new spiritual nature (2 Cor. 5:17; Gal. 6:15), and the power to live righteously in God's will (Rom. 6:11-14). However, during my time in this world, I still possess my sin nature (Rom. 7:14-25; Gal. 5:17), and occasionally I yield to temptation (both internal and external) and commit sin. "Conversion does not mean the eradication of the sin nature. Rather it means the implanting of the new, divine nature, with power to live victoriously over indwelling sin."² My acts of sin do not jeopardize my eternal salvation which was secured by the Lord Jesus Christ (John 10:28), but it does hurt my walk with the Lord (1 John 1:5-10), and stifles the work of the Holy Spirit who dwells within me (1 Cor. 3:16; Eph. 4:30; 1 Thess. 5:19). I sin every day, and some days more than others. As I grow spiritually in my knowledge of God's Word, I will pursue righteousness more and more and sin will diminish, but sin will never completely disappear from my life. Living in the reality of God's Word, I know three things are true when I sin:

1. There is no condemnation (Rom. 8:1). Though I have sinned against God, my eternal security and righteous standing before Him is never jeopardized. I am eternally secure (John 10:28), and keep on possessing the righteousness of God that was imputed to me at the moment of salvation (Rom. 4:1-5; 2 Cor. 5:21; Phil. 3:9).

² William MacDonald, *Believer's Bible Commentary: Old and New Testaments*, ed. Arthur Farstad (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1995), 2310.

Restoring Broken Fellowship with God

2. I am walking in darkness and have broken fellowship with God (1 John 1:5-6). When I sin, as a Christian, I have broken fellowship with God and stifled the work of the Holy Spirit who dwells within me (1 John 1:5-6; Eph. 4:30; 1 Thess. 5:19). If I continue in sin, or leave my sin unconfessed, I am in real danger of divine discipline from God (Ps. 32:3-4; Heb. 12:5-11; 1 John 5:16-17; cf. Dan. 4:37).
3. If I confess my sin directly to God, He will immediately forgive my sin and restore me to fellowship (1 John 1:9; cf. Ps. 32:5). Being in fellowship with God means walking in the sphere of His light (1 John 1:5-7), being honest with Him about my sin (1 John 1:8, 10), and coming before His throne of grace in transparent humility and confessing my sin that I will be forgiven (1 John 1:9; cf. Heb. 4:16). God is faithful and just to forgive my sins every time I confess them because of the atoning work of Christ who shed His blood on the cross for me (1 John 1:9; 2:1-2).

The forgiveness John speaks about here [i.e. 1 John 1:9] is parental, not judicial. Judicial forgiveness means forgiveness from the penalty of sins, which the sinner receives when he believes on the Lord Jesus Christ. It is called judicial because it is granted by God acting as Judge. But what about sins which a person commits after conversion? As far as the penalty is concerned, the price has already been paid by the Lord Jesus on the cross of Calvary. But as far as fellowship in the family of God is concerned, the sinning saint needs parental forgiveness, that is, the forgiveness of His Father.

Restoring Broken Fellowship with God

He obtains it by confessing his sin. We need judicial forgiveness only once; that takes care of the penalty of all our sins—past, present, and future. But we need parental forgiveness throughout our Christian life.³

God's grace compels me to pursue righteousness and good works (Tit. 2:11-14). But since I still have a sinful nature and live in a fallen world with temptation all around, I occasionally fall into sin. When I sin, I agree with God that I have done wrong and I confess it to Him seeking His forgiveness. When I sin against others and wrongly hurt them, I confess my sin to them and ask for their forgiveness. Because my sin hurts others (and their sin hurts me), there is a need for love, patience, humility, and ongoing forgiveness among the saints.

So, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you. Beyond all these things *put on* love, which is the perfect bond of unity. Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body; and be thankful. (Col. 3:12-15)

God's grace is wonderful to me. By grace he saves, and by grace he forgives and restores me to fellowship. It

³ William MacDonald, *Believer's Bible Commentary: Old and New Testaments*, ed. Arthur Farstad (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1995), 2310-11.

Restoring Broken Fellowship with God

is very simple. Daily I confess my sins directly to God, and He faithfully forgives me and restores me to fellowship with Him. It is all His goodness, and I am the fortunate recipient of His mercy and love.

An Ambassador for Christ

Now all these things are from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation, namely, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and He has committed to us the word of reconciliation. Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were making an appeal through us; we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. (2 Cor. 5:18-20)

An ambassador is an official dignitary who represents the country that sent him into a foreign land, and his message is derived from the sending ruler. The Christian ambassador represents the Lord Jesus Christ who has called and equipped him to speak on His behalf to those outside of Christ's kingdom (John 18:36; Acts 26:17-18; Col. 1:13-14). The Christian message is simple, that God reconciles us to Himself through the cross of Christ (2 Cor. 5:18-21; Eph. 2:13-16; Col. 1:19-20; 1 Pet. 3:18), providing us forgiveness for all our sins (Eph. 1:7; Col. 1:13-14), and the gift of His righteousness which makes us acceptable to Him (Isa. 61:10; 2 Cor. 5:21; Rom. 5:17; Phil. 3:9).

God does not have to be reconciled to man, because that was accomplished by Christ on the cross. It is sinful man who must be reconciled to God. "Religion" is man's feeble effort to be reconciled to God, efforts that are bound to fail. The Person who

An Ambassador for Christ

reconciles us to God is Jesus Christ, and the place where He reconciles us is His cross.¹

As Christian ambassadors, “we do not preach ourselves but Christ Jesus as Lord, and ourselves as your bond-servants for Jesus’ sake” (2 Cor. 4:5). God always goes before us and providentially coordinates our meetings with others, working in their hearts to receive our message (John 16:7-11), and rescuing from Satan’s captivity those who believe the gospel (2 Cor. 4:3-4; 2 Thess. 2:24-26). God never forces Himself on anyone, but neither does He leave unpunished those who reject the Christian message (Rev. 20:11-15). Those who disregard God’s gracious offer of salvation choose to continue in Satan’s world system (John 15:19; Rom. 1:18-25; 1 John 2:15-17), selecting darkness rather than light (John 3:19-20), and choosing the path that leads to eternal destruction (Matt. 7:13-14). As heavenly ambassadors we are responsible to present a clear biblical message, and though we may passionately seek to persuade, we are not accountable for how others respond to it.

As an ambassador of Christ, we are to speak and act with dignity at all times. We are to be clear in speaking God’s truth to people who are made in His image (fallen as they are). We are to point them to Christ that they might turn to Him for salvation and be born again to a new spiritual life (1 Pet. 1:3, 23). We are to “speak the truth in love” (Eph. 4:15), “with grace” (Col. 4:6), and “with gentleness and respect” (1 Pet. 3:15-16). There’s no place for hostility in the Christian life, for “the anger of man does

¹ Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, vol. 1 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1996), 649.

An Ambassador for Christ

not achieve the righteousness of God” (Jam. 1:20).
Scripture tells us:

The Lord’s bond-servant must not be quarrelsome, but be kind to all, able to teach, patient when wronged, with gentleness correcting those who are in opposition, if perhaps God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth, and they may come to their senses *and escape* from the snare of the devil, having been held captive by him to do his will. (2 Tim. 2:24-26).

In closing, the Christian ambassador is one who adheres to the highest standards of moral excellence according to Scripture as he serves the Lord and communicates His message that God reconciles us to Himself through the cross of Christ (2 Cor. 5:18-21; Eph. 2:13-16; Col. 1:19-20; 1 Pet. 3:18), providing us forgiveness for all our sins (Eph. 1:7; Col. 1:13-14), and the gift of His righteousness which makes us acceptable to Him (Isa. 61:10; 2 Cor. 5:21; Rom. 5:17; Phil. 3:9).

An Ambassador for Christ

The Christian Priesthood

The Christian Priesthood

Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, *which is* your spiritual service of worship. (Rom. 12:1)

In the church age, Christian spiritual service is connected with the priesthood of every believer (Rom. 12:1; 1 Pet. 2:5; Rev. 1:6). A priest offers worship to God and service to others. In the OT—before the Mosaic Law—few priests are mentioned. Melchizedek functioned as the king/priest of Salem (Gen. 14:18-20; cf. Heb. 7:1), and Reuel/Jethro (Moses' father-in-law) as the priest of Midian (Ex. 2:16-21; 3:1). Job served as the priest over his household, offering sacrifices for the sins of his family (Job. 1:5). Most people worshipped and served God as non-priests. Men such as Noah, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob built temporary stone altars and worshipped God directly (Gen. 8:20-21; Gen. 12:7; 13:18; 26:24-25; 35:1-7). Before the Mosaic Law, it appears that sacrifice and worship was personal, simple, did not require special attire, and was not tied to a specific geographic location or facility.

After Israel was delivered from the bondage of Egypt, God established the Hebrews as a theocratic nation among the Gentile nations of the world. God originally intended the whole nation to be a kingdom of priests, saying, “and you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation” (Ex. 19:6). However, because of the sin of worshipping the golden calf (Ex. 32:1-35), God took that privilege from the nation and confined the priesthood to the descendants of Aaron, and the Levites were their assistants

The Christian Priesthood

(Num. 3:1-10; 18:1-7). God required that priests could not have any physical defects (Lev. 21:17-23), and restricted the age to twenty-five to fifty (Num. 8:24-25). The priests were originally tied to the tabernacle for their service (and later to the temple), and special clothing was required both for the priests and the high priest. Throughout the years of their priestly service they were required to:

1. Be holy in their behavior (Ex. 19:6).
2. Teach God's Law to others (Lev. 10:11; Deut. 33:10).
3. Preserve the tabernacle and temple (Num. 18:1-4).
4. Perform official duties in the Holy of Holies once a year (Ex. 30:6-10; Lev. 16).
5. Inspect ceremonially unclean persons and fabrics (Lev. 13-14).
6. Receive the tithes (Num. 18:21, 26; cf. Heb. 7:5).
7. Offer sacrifices for sin to God (Lev. chapters 4, 9, 16).

The death of Christ on the cross fulfilled the Mosaic Law and ended the OT animal sacrificial system and the Aaronic priesthood (John 1:17; Rom. 6:14; 8:3-4; 10:4; 2 Cor. 3:1-13; Gal. 5:18). There is no specialized priesthood today, and the Catholic Church—or any organization—is not justified in creating a priestly cast within the body of Christ. Now, in the church age, every Christian is a priest to God (1 Pet. 2:5, 9; Rev. 1:6), and is indwelt by the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 3:16; 6:19). The Christian becomes a priest at the moment of salvation. This is the work of the Lord Jesus Christ, for “He has made us *to be* a kingdom, priests to His God and Father” (Rev. 1:6; cf. 1 Pet. 2:9). Peter writes, “you also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual

The Christian Priesthood

sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ” (1 Pet. 2:5). The functions of the Christian priesthood include:

1. The continual giving of the body for service to the Lord (Rom. 12:1-2).
2. The sacrifice of praise for worship (Heb. 13:15).
3. The doing of good works and sharing with others (Heb. 13:16; cf. Phil. 4:18).
4. The sacrifice of personal life for the benefit of others (Phil. 2:17; cf. Phil. 1:21-26; 2:3-4).
5. The walk of sacrificial love (Eph. 5:1-2; cf. 1 Pet. 1:22).
6. Confession of personal sin to God for restoration of fellowship (1 John 1:6-9).
7. Being filled with, and walking by means of the Holy Spirit (Eph. 5:18; Gal. 5:16, 25).

The practice of the Christian priesthood begins when the believer surrenders his own body as a “living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, *which is* your spiritual service of worship” (Rom. 12:1). Unlike the OT sacrifices which surrendered their life once, the Christian life is a moment by moment, continual surrender to God. This spiritual service is performed primarily within the body of Christ toward other believers for their benefit. Rather than offer the sacrifice of animals, the Christian is called to offer spiritual sacrifices. When Paul writes about giving ourselves as “a living and holy sacrifice” to God for “spiritual service” (Rom. 12:1), he does not leave his reader guessing as to what he means, for one has only to continue reading in Romans chapter 12 to understand his practical application. Only a few verses later the Apostle gives shoe leather to his statement when he writes about Christian service to other believers within the church.

The Christian Priesthood

For just as we have many members in one body and all the members do not have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. Since we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, *each of us is to exercise them accordingly*: if prophecy, according to the proportion of his faith; if service, in his serving; or he who teaches, in his teaching; or he who exhorts, in his exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness. (Rom. 12:4-8)

Spiritual sacrifice involves Christian service within the body of Christ as we exercise our spiritual gifts to meet the needs of other believers. This is love set in motion for the benefit of others. It is taking what God has given to us, spiritually or materially, and giving it freely, with an open hand, for others to be blessed. This is consistent with what Paul writes elsewhere when he states, “Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; do not *merely* look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others” (Phil. 2:3-4). From where does Paul learn this way of thinking? He learned it from the Lord Jesus Himself. For Paul states:

Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, *and* being made in the likeness of men. Being found in appearance as a man, He

The Christian Priesthood

humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. (Phil. 2:5-8)

Jesus is our prime example of a priestly life that has been surrendered for service to God. Jesus' life was given for the blessing of others. Jesus said, "I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep" (John 10:11). And elsewhere He stated, "For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45). Several things may be said about Jesus' selfless life:

First, Christ was willing to *go* where His Father chose. He was at home in the glory. It was His native environment; but He came into this world with a mission and message of grace. "God had an only Son and He was a foreign missionary." Such was His Father's will for Him and His attitude may be expressed by the familiar words: "I'll go where You want me to go, dear Lord." *Second*, Christ was willing to *be* whatever His Father chose. "He made Himself of no reputation." He was not only willing to lay aside the garments of His glory, but He was willing, as well, to be set at naught, to be spit upon and to be crucified. That was the Father's will for Him and His attitude may be expressed in the words: "I'll *be* what You want me to be." *Third*, Christ was willing to *do* whatever His Father chose. He became obedient unto death, and in so doing, His attitude may again be expressed in the words: "I'll *do* what You want me to do."¹

¹ Lewis Sperry Chafer, *He That Is Spiritual* (Moody Press: Chicago, 1918), 87.

The Christian Priesthood

Jesus sought to glorify the Father in every regard, and this meant living in accordance with Scripture and being willing to go and do whatever was required of Him. The purpose of life is not to be happy, but to glorify God; and this is only accomplished by a life of godliness and humble submission to the Lord.

Yieldedness to the will of God is not demonstrated by some one particular issue: it is rather a matter of having taken the will of God as the rule of one's life. To be in the will of God is simply to be *willing* to do His will without reference to any particular thing He may choose. It is electing His will to be *final*, even before we know what He may wish us to do. It is, therefore, not a question of being willing to do some one thing: it is a question of being willing to do *anything*, when, where and how, it may seem best in His heart of love. It is taking the normal and natural position of childlike trust which has already consented to the wish of the Father even before anything of the outworking of His wish is revealed.²

The priestly life of service to God and others belongs to every Christian. It is a life of sacrifice for the spiritual and material wellbeing of others, especially those within the church. More so, it begins when the believer decides to commit his/her life to God, to love kindness, to walk humbly, and to pursue righteousness and goodness in all things.

² Ibid., 88-89.

Is Self-Defense Biblical?

Is Self-Defense Biblical?

Are Christians biblically justified to use force for self-defense? Depending on the situation, the answer is sometimes *yes*, and sometimes *no*. Killing a thief is both justified and unjustified, depending on the situation (Ex 22:2-3). In Scripture there are examples of believers who at one time defended themselves or others, but then at other times fled and/or suffered for their faith. David, who killed Goliath (1 Sam 17:48-51), twice fled when Saul tried to kill him with a spear (1 Sam 18:11; 19:10), and refused to retaliate, even when he had opportunity (1 Sam 24:4-6).

In the book of Daniel, we learn about three Hebrews who opposed a tyrant and accepted the possibility of death by fire (Dan 3:1-30). Daniel chose to face death in a den of lions rather than cease his prayers to God (Dan 6:1-24). Peter defied the command to stop preaching in the name of Jesus (Acts 4:18-20; 5:28-29) and rejoiced after being flogged (Acts 5:40-41). Stephen offered prayers and forgiveness for those who stoned him to death (Acts 7:54-60). Paul avoided a murder attempt by escaping through an opening in a city wall as he was lowered to safety in a basket (Acts 9:23-25). Paul also accepted unjust persecutions, beatings, and imprisonment for Christ (2 Cor 11:23-30; 2 Tim 2:8-9).

Even Jesus did not fight against His accusers and attackers (Matt 26:51-53; John 18:10-11; 1 Pet 2:21-23), but willingly laid down His life (John 10:15, 18; Gal 2:20; Eph 5:25), and died a substitutionary death on a cross for our sins (Mark 10:45; 1 Cor 15:3-4; 2 Cor 5:21; 1 Pet 3:18). When asked about His kingship and kingdom, Jesus

Is Self-Defense Biblical?

said, “My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, then My servants would be fighting so that I would not be handed over to the Jews” (John 18:36a). When Peter drew a sword to defend Christ in the Garden of Gethsemane (John 18:10), Jesus stopped him and said, “Put the sword into the sheath; the cup which the Father has given Me, shall I not drink it?” (John 18:11). The Son of God had the means to defend Himself in the Garden of Gethsemane, for He declared, “do you think that I cannot appeal to My Father, and He will at once put at My disposal more than twelve legions of angels?” (Matt 26:53). Twelve legions of angels (approximately 72,000) would have been more than adequate to fight against Jesus’ attackers. However, it was not the Father’s will that Jesus be defended, either by angels or men, but that He suffer and die for our sins. This was for the Father’s glory and our benefit (John 12:28; 32-33; 17:1). The world is not worthy of those who suffer and die a martyr’s death for the cause of Christ (Heb 11:36-40).

Should Christians be Pacifists?

There are Christians who love the Lord Jesus and take His words seriously when He says, “do not resist an evil person; but whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also” (Matt 5:39). But is this a call for Christians to practice total pacifism? Norman Geisler states, “Biblical arguments for total pacifism are flawed. For example, Jesus’ command to turn the other cheek (Matt 5:39) refers to a personal insult (like a slap in the face), not to bodily harm.”¹ I agree with Geisler on this matter.

¹ Norman L. Geisler, “Does the Bible Support a Just War?” in *The Apologetics Study Bible: Real Questions, Straight*

Is Self-Defense Biblical?

Overlooking a personal insult can be very difficult at times, but this is what we're called to do.² The apostle Paul said, "Never pay back evil for evil to anyone. Respect what is right in the sight of all men. ¹⁸ If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men. ¹⁹ Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, 'Vengeance is mine, I will repay,' says the Lord" (Rom 12:17-19). As growing Christians, we should have a calm spirit, not be hypersensitive, exercise self-discipline, control our emotions, and learn to dismiss an insult. Solomon said, "A man's discretion makes him slow to anger, and it is his glory to overlook an offense" (Prov 19:11).

Is Killing the Same as Murder?

Killing is not the same as murder. Murder is the taking of a human life for unjustified reasons, and under God's Law, "the murderer shall surely be put to death" (Num 35:16; cf. Ex 21:12; Lev 24:17). God authorized killing when He told Noah, "Whoever sheds man's blood, by man his blood shall be shed, for in the image of God He made man" (Gen 9:6). In fact, God Himself has killed (Lev 10:1-3; 2 Sam 6:1-7; Acts 5:1-11; 1 Cor 11:27-30; cf., Deut

Answers, Stronger Faith, ed. Ted Cabal, Chad Owen Brand, E. Ray Clendenen et al. (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2007), 995.

² As God's children, we should expect unjust persecution and suffering in this fallen world (John 15:18-19; Phil 1:29; 2 Tim 1:12; 1 Pet 3:14, 17), and when attacked because of our faith, should not retaliate (Rom 12:17-21; 1 Pet 2:23), but trust God that He will deliver if He chooses (Dan 3:17-18; 6:21-22; Acts 5:19-20; 12:6-7).

Is Self-Defense Biblical?

32:39; 1 Sam 2:6) and will kill again (Rev 9:15; 19:11-21). God's law for Israel listed specific violations that warranted the death penalty.³ Though these are few in number, they clearly show that killing is not wrong in God's sight. But if an offender displayed humility, God may grant a reduced sentence.⁴ God's directive for capital punishment continues into the New Testament (Rom 13:4-6).

³ The sins that warranted the death penalty include: intentional murder (Ex 21:12-14; cf. Gen 9:6), attacking or cursing a parent (Ex 21:15), kidnapping (Ex 21:16), habitual rebellion against God (Deut 17:12), sacrificing to pagan gods (Ex 22:20), cursing God (Lev 24:15-16), working on the Sabbath (Ex 35:2), being a false prophet and leading Israelites into idolatry (Deut 13:1-5), religious human sacrifice (Lev 20:2), the practice of divination, sorcery or witchcraft (Ex 22:18; Deut 18:9-14), adultery and premarital sex (Lev 20:10-14; 21:9; Deut 22:22), sex with an animal (Ex 22:19; Lev 20:15-16), incest (Lev 20:11-12, 14), homosexuality (Lev 18:22; 20:13), and the rape of a married woman (Deut 22:25-27).

⁴ For example, in Scripture we read about David's adulterous affair with Bathsheba and the murder of her husband, Uriah (2 Sam 11:1-17). The divine estimation was, "the thing that David had done was evil in the sight of the LORD" (2 Sam 11:27). Biblically, both offenses warranted the death penalty under God's law (Ex 21:12-14; Deut 22:22). What is commendable about David is that he handled his sin in a biblical manner by confessing it and seeking the Lord's forgiveness. Concerning Uriah and Bathsheba, David said, "I have sinned against the LORD" (2 Sam 12:13; read Psalm 51 for the longer version of David's confession). And upon his confession, the prophet Nathan said to David, "The LORD also has taken away your sin; you shall not die" (2 Sam 12:13). Here we see God's grace and government at work; for though David was forgiven and restored to fellowship with God, there were still

Is Self-Defense Biblical?

Good Government's Right to Kill

When doing God's will, governmental rulers are to be respected and obeyed, as God has granted them the authority to kill for just reasons. Scripture states, "for it [government] is a minister of God to you for good. But if you do what is evil, be afraid; for it does not bear the sword for nothing" (Rom 13:4a). The sword is a picture of capital punishment, which God sanctions by means of the governments of this world. Capital punishment is necessary to exact justice for those who have been innocently murdered and to deter future acts of evil. Killing is justified when God commands it.

Certainly, there are rulers who abuse their power for sinful purposes, and at times need to be resisted (with wisdom and courage). However, for the most part, governments serve as "a minister of God" (Rom 13:4), and for this reason, we submit ourselves "for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether to a king as the one in authority, or to governors as sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and the praise of those who do right" (1 Pet 2:13-14). Furthermore, governments employ and empower police and military as a means of restraining evil, and this sometimes requires force, and even deadly force. Good government will adequately fund and support their police and military. And if a Christian is called into police or military service, then he may be the one who wields the instrument of punishment to accomplish God's

consequences for his actions and the Lord dispensed judgment upon David and Bathsheba (2 Sam 12:14-18).

Is Self-Defense Biblical?

will. In this case, he needs to be the best police officer or soldier he can be, and this for God's glory.

Biblical Examples of Self-Defense

In Genesis, we read that Abram fought against Chedorlaomer to defend the innocent and restore stolen property (Gen 14:1-24). David used force to rescue his family and belongings from Amalekites who destroyed and plundered the city of Ziklag (1 Sam 30:1-20).⁵ In the book of Esther, we learn about a man named Haman, who "sought to destroy all the Jews" (Est 3:6). By deceit, Haman convinced King Ahasuerus to pass a decree that would allow him to kill all the Jews, and the king blindly passed the law (Est 3:7-14). Later, Haman was hanged on the gallows he intended for the Jews (Est 7:10; 8:7), and afterwards, King Ahasuerus passed a second law which "granted the Jews who were in each and every city the right to assemble and to defend their lives" (Est 8:11). When they came under attack, "the Jews struck all their enemies with the sword, killing and destroying" (Est 9:5). The sword was the weapon being used against the Jews, and the sword was used by Hebrews to defend themselves. This was clearly self-defense. When Nehemiah was rebuilding the city wall in Jerusalem, both he and his builders were under threat of attack (Neh 4:1-10). Nehemiah split his forces between defenders and workers, and Nehemiah said, "half of my servants carried on the work while half of them

⁵ David was a man of war and had spent years developing his martial skills. He even blessed God for the military skills he'd received, saying, "Blessed be the LORD, my rock, Who trains my hands for war, and my fingers for battle" (Psa 144:1; cf. Psa 18:34).

Is Self-Defense Biblical?

held the spears, the shields, the bows and the breastplates; and the captains were behind the whole house of Judah” (Neh 4:16) And it is said of the builders themselves that “each wore his sword girded at his side as he built” (Neh 4:18). Clearly these swords were for self-defense. Jesus, toward the end of His ministry on earth, told His disciples, “Whoever has no sword is to sell his coat and buy one” (Luke 22:36). Norman Geisler states, “while Jesus forbade His disciples from using a sword for spiritual purposes (Matt 26:52), He urged His disciples to buy a sword if necessary for protection (Luke 22:36–38).”⁶

Sometimes legal defense is the preferred course of action. Paul, who at one time took a beating with rods (Acts 16:22-23), later used legal force against his attackers by exercising his rights as Roman citizen to protect himself from a flogging that might have killed him (Acts 22:25-29). And Paul eventually appealed to Caesar, hoping to gain a just trial (Acts 25:7-12). Christians can certainly use the legal system as a means of protection.

Americans and Self-Defense

Law-abiding responsible Americans have the right to own a firearm for self-defense. This is our constitutional right according the Second Amendment of the United States of America, which declares, “A well-regulated militia, being necessary to the security of a free state, the right of the people to keep and bear arms, shall not be infringed.” There is no conflict between Christianity and our constitutional right as Americans to own guns for

⁶ Norman L. Geisler, “Does the Bible Support a Just War?”, 995.

Is Self-Defense Biblical?

protection and self-defense. Wayne Grudem states, “A gun is the most effective means of defense in all kinds of threatening situations, especially against attackers who may be stronger or more numerous. Protection of the right to own a gun is especially important in areas of higher crime or more frequent violence.”⁷

If you don’t like guns as a method of self-defense, then by all means have some protection, whether pepper spray, a knife, taser, or whatever increases your ability to neutralize a threat. Having an alert mind that pays attention to your surroundings is your best defense. Also, it might be helpful to use psychological deterrents to keep criminals away from your home.⁸

Summary

There are times when using lethal force is justified, and other times not. God sanctions justified killing, but not murder. God has granted good governments the right to

⁷ Wayne A. Grudem, *Politics according to the Bible: A Comprehensive Resource for Understanding Modern Political Issues in Light of Scripture* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010), 211.

⁸ For example, keep the outside of your house well lit, install cameras (or fake ones if you can’t afford real ones), post signs that say your property is managed by a security company, or signs that say you’ll use force if needed. For most criminals there is a risk versus reward mentality, and they are often deterred from committing crime if the risk of being caught, injured, or punished exceeds the prospect of reward. This assumes some rational thinking, and I realize some criminals engage in harmful behavior without thought or fear (perhaps because they’re impaired by drugs or a mental disorder).

Is Self-Defense Biblical?

kill, both as a means of exacting justice and deterring crime. And there are clear examples of believers in Scripture who used lethal force as a means of protecting themselves from unjustified attacks. Furthermore, God Himself has killed and will kill again. Lastly, law-abiding Christians in America have the constitutional right to keep and bear arms as a means of self-defense.

Wisdom from God

Wisdom from God¹

The proverbs of Solomon the son of David, king of Israel: to know wisdom and instruction, to discern the sayings of understanding, to receive instruction in wise behavior, righteousness, justice and equity; to give prudence to the naïve, to the youth knowledge and discretion, a wise man will hear and increase in learning, and a man of understanding will acquire wise counsel, to understand a proverb and a figure, the words of the wise and their riddles. The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction. (Proverbs 1:1-7)

According to verses 2-6 we see a five-fold purpose for Proverbs: 1) “to know wisdom and instruction,” 2) “to discern the sayings of understanding,” 3) “to receive instruction in wise behavior, righteousness, justice and equity,” 4) “to give prudence to the naïve,” and 5) “to understand a proverb and a figure, the words of the wise and their riddles.”

The Hebrew word *hokmah* (translated “wisdom” in verse 2) appears forty-five times in the book of Proverbs and is the common theme of the book. In a general sense, wisdom is the knowledge necessary to perform a task successfully. Overall, the book of Proverbs is a compilation of wise sayings which provide the necessary

¹ This article is taken from my book, *Making a Biblical Marriage*, 107-111.

Wisdom from God

instruction for making good choices in life. The book of Proverbs belongs to that group of biblical literature classified as wisdom writings; and the didactic nature of Proverbs made it useful for parents who wanted to instruct their children, as well as teachers who wanted to instruct their students. A proverb is a concise and pithy statement that summarizes an experience or compares two things; thus capturing a principle that benefits one throughout his life. Often it is teaching by analogy.

In verse 7 Solomon tells his readers that “the fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge; [whereas] fools despise wisdom and instruction.” In this antithetical parallelism, Solomon contrasts the healthy humble minded person who fears the LORD with the arrogant person who shuns Him. The attitude of the heart determines how a person responds to God’s revelation. The person who fears God respects His authority and responds properly to His word. The fool is the one who is devoid of God’s word, or rejects it after hearing it.

The Bible contrasts divine wisdom which comes from God, and worldly wisdom which ultimately comes from Satan (James 3:15-17). **Divine wisdom** is the knowledge necessary to perform a task in conformity to His standards and values. Examples of divine wisdom include:

1. **Artistic wisdom:** The ability to create works of art (e.g. the artisans who created the garments for Levitical priests as well as the articles of worship in the Jewish Temple, Ex. 28:3; 31:2-5; 1 Ki. 7:14).
2. **Academic wisdom:** The ability to learn about God’s world (e.g. zoology, biology, botany, etc.)

Wisdom from God

and write books (e.g. Solomon's proverbs and songs, 1 Ki. 4:29-34).

3. **Judicial wisdom:** The ability to decide legal matters for God's people (e.g. Judges, Solomon, etc. 1 Ki. 16:28).
4. **Military wisdom:** The ability to defeat God's enemies (e.g. Joshua, David; Prov. 20:18; 21:22; 24:6).
5. **Governing wisdom:** The ability to leads God's people into His will (e.g. Joseph, Moses, Nehemiah, Church Elders, etc.).
6. **Serving wisdom:** The ability to meet the needs of others (e.g. Deacons, Acts 6:3).
7. **Teaching wisdom:** The ability to communicate clearly God's Word to others (e.g. Moses, Paul, etc., Col. 1:9).
8. **Spiritual wisdom:** The ability to live God's will in accordance with His Word.

Worldly wisdom is the knowledge required to live in Satan's fallen world, has the appearance of real wisdom, but is actually deceptive and seeks to ensnare people in Satan's schemes (Ex. 7:11; Col. 2:23; Jas. 3:14-15). Those who are called wise in a worldly sense are actually fools by God's estimation. The majority of people in this world operate according to worldly wisdom and live their lives outside of God's will.

Examples of worldly wise men include the magicians of Pharaoh's court who were demonically enabled to replicate some of the miracles performed by Moses (Ex. 7:11), and Nebuchadnezzar's counselors who claimed to be able to interpret dreams and have spiritual insight into his future (Dan. 2:12-18). The apostle Paul

Wisdom from God

spoke out against worldly judgments which have “the appearance of wisdom in self-made religion and self-abasement and severe treatment of the body, but are of no value against fleshly indulgence” (Col. 2:23); and James admonished his readers to be on guard against “bitter jealousy and selfish ambition” which is a wisdom that “does not come down from above, but is earthly, natural, demonic” (Jas. 3:14-15). In the end, worldly wisdom is always Satan-serving; whereas divine wisdom is always God-serving.

We do well to know that it is possible to lose wisdom and become a fool. We know that even Lucifer was once wise, for the prophet Ezekiel tells us that he had “the seal of perfection, full of wisdom and perfect in beauty” (Ezek. 28:12). Ezekiel goes on to say that Lucifer’s “heart was lifted up” because of his beauty and his wisdom became corrupted by reason of his splendor (Ezek. 28:17). From within himself Satan’s wisdom was turned to foolishness. Through Isaiah the prophet, God gives us a glimpse into Satan’s mind, and tells us what he was thinking in his heart. At the time of his foolishness Satan declared:

“I will ascend to heaven; I will raise my throne above the stars of God, and I will sit on the mount of assembly in the recesses of the north. ‘I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High.’” (Isa. 14:13-14)

Lucifer created his kingdom of darkness when he sinned, and through temptation he brought down to death the first humans when he convinced them to turn from God and follow his advice. Now all men are born into this

Wisdom from God

world of darkness, into Satan's kingdom, born in Adam, born in sin. The minds of all men are darkened by the sin nature and have a propensity toward foolishness. Even after regeneration, men's minds are not suddenly wise, but still dark from all the world's philosophies. Two things must happen before a saved person can have God's wisdom: 1) he must learn to fear the Lord, and 2) he must discipline his mind to seek truth. The fear of the Lord and seeking truth go together like two sides of a coin.

The fear of the Lord is to acknowledge Him as Lord and His right to rule over our lives and to respond with obedience. Solomon declares that we are to "fear God and keep His commandments" (Eccl. 12:13). The fear of the Lord is that healthy reverence the believer has for God, knowing that He is the Sovereign Lord of the universe, and that as His creature we do well to submit to Him.

To seek truth means we apply our minds to know God's word, and once we know it, to apply His truth to every area of our lives. Jesus declared "the man who hears my words and does them shall be compared to a wise man who built his house upon the rock" (Matt. 7:24). Here, Jesus tells us the wise man is the one who hears His words and does them. There is order here, for one cannot live what he does not know, and knowledge of God's word must precede application to life.

Jesus, as our role-model, spent His entire life learning and living by His Father's teaching. Luke tells us that Jesus, as a child, "continued to grow and become strong, increasing in wisdom" (Luke 2:40). Messiah, speaking in Isaiah 50:4 states, "He awakens Me morning by morning, He awakens My ear to listen as a disciple." Jesus

Wisdom from God

woke each morning to give His ear to the Father's instruction. Mark tells us in his Gospel, "In the early morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, and went away to a secluded place, and was praying there" (Mark 1:35). It is healthy to fear the Lord and seek His instruction for every area of our life.

God's greatest expression of wisdom is the cross of Christ. To those who hold to worldly wisdom, "the word of the cross is foolishness" (1 Cor. 1:18). To those who are saved, the cross of Christ is "the power of God and the wisdom of God" (1 Cor. 1:24). Divine wisdom always leads one to God through the cross of Christ. Any so-called wisdom that does not lead one ultimately to the cross of Christ is pseudo-wisdom. God has rejected the world's wisdom, and the world has rejected His.

One knows he has found wisdom when he has found the Lord; for true wisdom exists only in relation to Him. One knows he is growing in wisdom when he fears the Lord, respecting His authority and doing the things that are pleasing in His sight. The believer is benefitted, and God is honored, when His word is understood and obeyed on a regular basis.

The wise believer knows his place in God's creation; that he is the creature, and God is the Creator, and there is submission one to the Other. The fool is the one who blurs the creator/creature distinction, and sets his will against the will of God. The fool is devoid of God's wisdom, and his words and actions reveal his darkened heart. On the other hand, the wise man learns God's word that he may live His will, and this too is revealed through his words and actions.

Wisdom from God

Lastly, the wise believer seeks to incorporate God's word into every area of his life, and does not compartmentalize, leaving some areas to self. Wisdom gives order and purpose to life, and affords one the knowledge necessary to make good choices. The wise believer is able to understand the world around him, and knows why things are the way they are, and why people behave the way they do. Wisdom gives one hope for the future, because Christ is coming back, and He will reign in righteousness and truth (Rev. 20:1-6).

Below are forty Scriptural truths regarding biblical wisdom:

1. The Lord possesses and operates by His wisdom (Ps. 104:24; Prov. 3:19; Jer. 10:12).
2. Wisdom comes from the Lord (1 Kings 3:12; Prov. 2:6; Dan. 2:21; Jas. 1:5).
3. God's wisdom is found in Scripture (Ps. 19:7; 119:98; Jer. 8:9; 2 Tim. 3:15).
4. Jesus, while in hypostatic union, had to learn wisdom day by day (Lu. 2:40, 52; Isa. 50:4).
5. Wisdom is better than riches (Prov. 8:11; 16:16).
6. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom (Ps. 111:10; Prov. 1:7; 9:10).
7. Wisdom lies first in what we think, then in what we say and do (Ps. 51:6; Col. 4:5).
8. The humble receive wisdom (Prov. 11:2).
9. Wisdom can be communicated by speech or writing (1 Ki. 11:41; Prov. 15:7; 1 Cor. 2:6-8, 13).
10. The one who loves his soul seeks wisdom (Prov. 19:8; 24:14).
11. Wisdom is pleasant to the soul (Prov. 2:10).

Wisdom from God

12. Wisdom is better than strength (Eccl. 9:14-16).
13. A wise man accepts reproof and instruction (Prov. 9:8-9; 10:8).
14. The wise man has persuasive speech (Prov. 16:23).
15. The wise man boasts of the Lord (Jer. 9:23-24).
16. The wise man accepts Jesus as his savior (1 Cor. 1:18-31).
17. Christ is the wisdom and power of God (1 Cor. 1:24).
18. The wise man walks in righteousness (Hos. 14:9).
19. The wise man hears and acts on the words of Christ (Matt. 7:24).
20. The wise man engages in good deeds done in gentleness (Jas. 3:13).
21. The wise man controls his temper (Prov. 29:11).
22. The wise person avoids intoxication (Prov. 20:1).
23. Military victory comes by wise guidance (Prov. 20:18; 21:22; 24:6).
24. Wise men hang-out together (Prov. 13:20; 15:31).
25. The wise decide judicial matters (Ezra 7:25; 1 Cor. 6:1-7).
26. The woman of excellence speaks wisdom (Prov. 31:26).
27. The wise parent disciplines his child (Prov. 29:15).
28. A wise child is better than a foolish ruler (Eccl. 4:13).
29. The wise child accepts his parents discipline (Prov. 13:1).
30. A wise son makes his father and mother happy (Prov. 23:15, 24; 27:11; 29:3).
31. Wisdom helps a man understand his culture (Eccl. 1:13).
32. Wisdom helps the believer discern the future (Deut. 32:29).

Wisdom from God

33. One does not have to be old to be wise (Dan. 1:4; Matt. 11:25).
34. Wisdom leads one away from evil (Prov. 3:7; 14:16).
35. The wise man learns from nature and others (Prov. 6:5; 24:30-34).
36. An accepted bribe blinds the eyes of the wise (Deut. 16:19).
37. The wisdom of the world is foolishness (1 Cor. 3:19).
38. The fool is the one who rejects and despises wisdom (Prov. 1:7; 23:9).
39. The rod of suffering belongs to the one who lacks wisdom (Prov. 10:13; 14:3).
40. There is a worldly/demonic wisdom (Ex. 7:11; Col. 2:23; Jas. 3:14-15).

Dealing with Fools

Dealing with Fools¹

The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction. (Prov. 1:7)

The *fear of the Lord* for the unbeliever is fear of His judgment (Matt. 10:28), and it is a fear that can lead to Christ for salvation (1 Cor. 15:3-4). For the believer, the *fear of the Lord* is a profound reverence for God because He is holy, righteous and just (Ps. 89:14; 1 Pet. 1:15-16). It is a healthy fear that leads to knowledge and obedience. Moses wrote, “You shall fear the LORD your God; you shall serve Him and cling to Him, and you shall swear by His name” (Deut. 10:20). The *fear of the Lord* discourages sinfulness because we know He will discipline us in love if we turn away (Heb. 12:5-11). The *fear of the Lord* is to hate what God hates; for Scripture reveals, “the fear of the LORD is to hate evil; pride and arrogance and the evil way and the perverted mouth” (Prov. 8:13). The fool has no fear of God, and he is said to “despise wisdom and instruction” (Prov. 1:7b).

The Bible, especially Proverbs, contrasts the wise man (Heb. *ḥokmā*; Gk. *sophía*) with the fool (Heb. *ʿwīl*, *kʿsīl*, *nāḥāl*; *sākāl*; Gk. *áphrōn*, *mōros*, *anóētos*).² Wisdom (Heb. *hokmah*, Grk. *sophos*) is the beneficial instruction

¹ This article is taken from my book, *Making a Biblical Marriage*, 113-119.

² Allen C. Myers, “Fool”, *The Eerdmans Bible Dictionary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1987), 390.

Dealing with Fools

necessary for making good choices that agree with God's Word. The Bible contrasts divine wisdom which comes from God, and worldly wisdom which ultimately comes from Satan (James 3:15-17). Divine wisdom is the knowledge necessary to perform a task in conformity to God's standards and values. Biblical wisdom is based on God's revelation in the Bible and leads to moral uprightness. The wise man "will hear and increase in learning, and a man of understanding will acquire wise counsel" (Prov. 1:5; cf. 2:5); however, "fools despise wisdom and instruction. (Prov. 1:7b). The fool rejects the wisdom of God in Scripture which leads to salvation and righteous living. The fool can be educated or uneducated, rich or poor, white or black, old or young, male or female. He is friendly toward the world and its philosophies and values that promote human wisdom and accomplishments. "A fool is not necessarily one who is marked by a low IQ but one who leaves God out of his consciousness...The fool is the man who does not take God into consideration in every area of his life."³

The word [fool] is used in Scripture with respect to *moral* more than to intellectual deficiencies. The "fool" is not so much one lacking in mental powers, as one who misuses them; not one who does not reason, but reasons wrongly. In Scripture the "fool" primarily is the person who casts off the fear of God and thinks and acts as if he could safely disregard the eternal principles of God's righteousness (Ps. 14:1; Prov. 14:9; Jer. 17:11;

³ J. Dwight Pentecost, *Designed to Be Like Him: Understanding God's Plan for Fellowship, Conduct, Conflict, and Maturity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2001), 55.

Dealing with Fools

etc.). Yet in many passages, especially in Proverbs, the term has its ordinary use and denotes one who is rash, senseless, or unreasonable. The expression “you fool” (Matt. 5:22) is used in the *moral* sense, means “wicked,” and seems to be equivalent to judging one as worthy of everlasting punishment.⁴

The fool, according to Solomon, is a fool by choice and never by chance. He can stop being a fool anytime he’s ready to learn and apply God’s word. He makes himself a fool by the way he *thinks*, and is identified as a fool by the way he *speaks* and by his *behavior*. Over time, folly can be so ingrained into a person that neither kindness nor suffering can remove it from them. Here are some biblical facts about the fool:

1. The fool is a fool by choice and never by chance (Prov. 1:22-33). “How long, O naive ones, will you love being simple-minded? And scoffers delight themselves in scoffing and fools hate knowledge?” (Prov. 1:22). “A fool does not delight in understanding, but only in revealing his own mind” (Prov. 18:2; cf. 14:9). He can stop being a fool anytime he’s ready to learn and apply God’s word.
2. The fool can be recognized by his outward behavior. “Even when the fool walks along the road, his sense is lacking and he demonstrates to everyone *that* he is a fool” (Eccl. 10:3).
3. The fool loves to slander others. “He who conceals hatred *has* lying lips, and he who spreads slander is

⁴ Merrill Frederick Unger, R. K. Harrison, Howard Frederic Vos et al., “Fool”, *The New Unger’s Bible Dictionary*, (Chicago: Moody Press, 1988).

Dealing with Fools

- a fool” (Prov. 10:18). Slander is the intentional circulation of a falsehood about another for the purpose of destroying their character.
4. Wickedness is like a game to fool, and it thrills him to do evil. “Doing wickedness is like sport to a fool, and *so is* wisdom to a man of understanding” (Prov. 10:23).
 5. A fool can spout proverbial wisdom, but it has no meaning to him personally. “*Like* a thorn *which* falls into the hand of a drunkard, so is a proverb in the mouth of fools” (Prov. 26:9; cf. 15:2, 7). There are people who have some biblical knowledge, but because they are a fool it becomes distorted and twisted to their own harm and the harm of others. “A fool’s mouth is his ruin, and his lips are the snare of his soul” (Prov. 18:7; cf. 10:8, 10).
 6. Children are naturally bent toward foolishness and the loving parent seeks to discipline it out of them. “Foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child; the rod of discipline will remove it far from him” (Prov. 22:15). “The rod and reproof give wisdom, but a child who gets his own way brings shame to his mother” (Prov. 29:15).
 7. The foolish child rejects his parent’s discipline. “A fool rejects his father’s discipline, but he who regards reproof is sensible” (Prov. 15:5).
 8. Over time, as the fool becomes an adult, his folly becomes entrenched in his heart and he is very resistant to any external pressures to change. “A rebuke goes deeper into one who has understanding than a hundred blows into a fool” (Prov. 17:10). “Though you pound a fool in a mortar with a pestle along with crushed grain, *yet* his foolishness will not depart from him” (Prov. 27:22).

Dealing with Fools

9. The fool is a grief to his father and mother. “A wise son makes a father glad, but a foolish son is a grief to his mother” (Prov. 10:1; cf. 15:20). “He who sires a fool *does so* to his sorrow, and the father of a fool has no joy” (Prov. 17:21; cf. 19:13).
10. The fool ruins his own life and fights against God. “The foolishness of man ruins his way, and his heart rages against the LORD” (Prov. 19:3).
11. Fools like to argue with others without a just cause. “Keeping away from strife is an honor for a man, but any fool will quarrel” (Prov. 20:3). It’s better to avoid the fool rather than pursue conflict with him. “When a wise man has a controversy with a foolish man, the foolish man either rages or laughs, and there is no rest” (Prov. 29:9; cf. 20:23).
12. Fools are arrogant and often storm through life without consideration of others. “A wise man is cautious and turns away from evil, but a fool is arrogant and careless” (Prov. 14:16).
13. Those who employ a fool feel the painful effects of his stupidity. “*Like* an archer who wounds everyone, so is he who hires a fool or who hires those who pass by” (Prov. 26:10).
14. Fools repeat the same ugly acts over and over. “Like a dog that returns to its vomit is a fool who repeats his folly” (Prov. 26:11).
15. Fools have no control of their emotions. “A fool always loses his temper, but a wise man holds it back” (Prov. 29:11; cf. 25:28).
16. Fools pursue worldly pleasure and ruin themselves. “The mind of the wise is in the house of mourning, while the mind of fools is in the house of pleasure” (Eccl. 7:4).

Dealing with Fools

17. The words of the wise are gracious, whereas the words of the fool express wickedness. “Words from the mouth of a wise man are gracious, while the lips of a fool consume him; the beginning of his talking is folly and the end of it is wicked madness” (Eccl. 10:12-13).
18. The person who befriends a fool causes himself harm. “He who walks with wise men will be wise, but the companion of fools will suffer harm” (Prov. 13:20).

Dealing with the fool:

Wise men often do not answer the fool because he’s not teachable; though there are times the fool needs to be corrected so that his false estimation of himself does not go unchecked. Wise men leave the presence of the fool, as there is no benefit to his company. When one encounters a fool, there are several things one should do depending on the encounter.

1. Once a fool is identified, don’t provoke him, or you will bring grief on yourself. “A stone is heavy and the sand weighty, but the provocation of a fool is heavier than both of them” (Prov. 27:3).
2. Avoid speaking in the presence of a fool, or at least keep your words few. “Do not speak in the hearing of a fool, for he will despise the wisdom of your words” (Prov. 23:9). Fools despise wisdom, so they despise those who speak and live by wisdom.
3. Don’t answer the fool in the midst of his foolishness. “Do not answer a fool according to his folly, or you will also be like him” (Prov. 26:4). It is foolish to try to correct the fool, and is itself a

Dealing with Fools

display of folly that reveals a lack of biblical understanding.

4. There are times to address the fool so that he does not think himself wise. “Answer a fool as his folly deserves, that he not be wise in his own eyes” (Prov. 26:5). This type of correction does not seek to correct the fool, but only his false estimation of himself. Wisdom discerns when to answer the fool.
5. Lastly, make the conscious decision to leave the presence of the fool in order to spare yourself any pain. “Leave the presence of a fool, or you will not discern words of knowledge” (Prov. 14:7). This is because “the foolishness of fools is deceit” and there is no truth in their speech (Prov. 14:8b).

Dealing with Fools

The Spiritual Christian

The Spiritual Christian

The spiritual Christian enjoys life and celebrates the many wonders of God's creation and takes pleasure in things such a walk in the woods, a baby's smile, a beautiful sunset, a satisfying meal and good friends. The spiritual Christian always keeps the Creator and creation distinct in his thinking, worshipping the former while enjoying the latter. Worldliness, however, is a mindset that perverts the enjoyment of the creation by calling men to use it in ways God never intended. The worldly minded person, whether Christian or not, uses the creation for selfish and destructive ends, and at times will even worship it in place of God (Rom. 1:18-25). Concerning spiritual enjoyment, Lewis Sperry Chafer wrote:

The world and "worldly" Christians turn to so-called "worldly" things because they discover in them an anesthetic to deaden the pain of an empty heart and life. The anesthetic, which is often quite innocent in itself, is not so serious a matter as the empty heart and life. Little is gained toward true spirituality when would-be soul doctors have succeeded in persuading the afflicted to get on without the anesthetic. If these instructors do not present the reality of consolation and filling for heart and life which God has provided, the condition will not be improved. How misleading is the theory that to be spiritual one must abandon play, diversion and helpful amusement! Such a conception of spirituality is born of a morbid human conscience. It is foreign to the Word of God. It is a device of Satan to make the blessings of God seem

The Spiritual Christian

abhorrent to young people who are overflowing with physical life and energy. It is to be regretted that there are those who in blindness are so emphasizing the negatives of the Truth that the impression is created that spirituality is opposed to joy, liberty and naturalness of expression in thought and life in the Spirit. Spirituality is not a pious pose. It is not a “Thou shall not”; is it “Thou shalt.” It flings open the doors into the eternal blessedness, energies and resources of God. It is a serious thing to remove the element of relaxation and play from any life. We cannot be normal physically, mentally or spiritually if we neglect the vital factor in human life. God has provided that our joy shall be full.¹

¹ Lewis S. Chafer, *He that is Spiritual* (Grand Rapids, Mich. Zondervan Publishing, 1967), 60-61.

Walking with God

Enoch walked with God three hundred years after he became the father of Methuselah, and he had *other* sons and daughters. So all the days of Enoch were three hundred and sixty-five years. Enoch walked with God; and he was not, for God took him. (Gen. 5:22-24)

The genealogical record of Genesis chapter 5 is repetitious: men *lived* and *died*. The repetition is broken with one man, Enoch, as Moses wrote, “God took him” (Gen. 5:24). God decided His friend, the one who “walked” with Him, would not see death, so the Lord took him directly to heaven. “The word *walk* implies a steady, progressive relationship and not just a casual acquaintance. To walk **with God** is the business of a lifetime, and not just the performance of an hour.”¹ It is written in the New Testament, “By faith Enoch was taken up so that he would not see death; and he was not found because God took him up; for he obtained the witness that before his being taken up he was pleasing to God” (Heb. 11:5).

Enoch walked with God because he was His friend and liked His company, because he was going in the same direction as God, and had no desire for anything but what lay in God’s path. We walk with God when He is in all our thoughts; not because we

¹ William MacDonald, *Believer’s Bible Commentary: Old and New Testaments*, ed. Arthur Farstad (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1995), 38.

Walking with God

consciously think of Him at all times, but because He is naturally suggested to us by all we think of; as when any person or plan or idea has become important to us, no matter what we think of, our thought is always found recurring to this favorite object, so with the godly man everything has a connection with God and must be ruled by that connection. When some change in his circumstances is thought of, he has first of all to determine how the proposed change will affect his connection with God—will his conscience be equally clear, will he be able to live on the same friendly terms with God and so forth. When he falls into sin he cannot rest till he has resumed his place at God's side and walks again with Him. This is the general nature of walking with God; it is a persistent endeavor to hold all our life open to God's inspection and in conformity to His will; a readiness to give up what we find does cause any misunderstanding between us and God; a feeling of loneliness if we have not some satisfaction in our efforts at holding fellowship with God, a cold and desolate feeling when we are conscious of doing something that displeases Him. This walking with God necessarily tells on the whole life and character. As you instinctively avoid subjects which you know will jar upon the feelings of your friend, as you naturally endeavor to suit yourself to your company, so when the consciousness of God's presence begins to have some weight with you, you are found instinctively endeavoring to please Him, repressing the thoughts you know He disapproves, and endeavoring to educate such dispositions as reflect His own nature. It is easy then to understand

Walking with God

how we may practically walk with God—it is to open to Him all our purposes and hopes, to seek His judgment on our scheme of life and idea of happiness—it is to be on thoroughly friendly terms with God.²

Walking with God starts with a relationship. It is a relationship in which we are rightly related to God by faith (John 3:16), and one that continues in faith (2 Cor. 5:7), trusting Him in all things (Prov. 3:5-6). To “walk with God” is the ideal standard for a believer (Lev. 26:3-12; Gal. 5:16, 25; Eph. 4:1; Col. 2:6-7; cf. Rev. 3:4). It does not mean a life of sinless perfection; rather, it means that when we sin, we handle it in a biblical manner with humility and confession (e.g. 2 Sam. 12:1-23; cf. 1 Kings 11:4; 1 John 1:8-10). Walking with God means we go in the same direction He is going, and like a friend, we are glad to share in His fellowship (1 John 1:1-10). It means God is regularly in our thoughts, and we live every day conscious of Him and His will for our lives (Rom. 12:1-2; Col. 3:16-17). Walking with God means we are open and honest with Him about everything, and agree to let His light shine in our lives, not fearing what it exposes (1 John 1:5-7). It means being sensitive to what may offend Him, and making every effort to please Him through a life of faith (2 Cor. 5:9; Heb. 11:6). May we all learn to walk with the Lord.

² Marcus Dods, *The Book of Genesis* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1893), 51-53.

Walking with God

What Does it Mean to be a Man?

What Does it Mean to be a Man?

What does it mean to be a man? The answers are as varied as the people who give them. Some would point to genetics, anatomy, or character. Others measure men by their accomplishments, by the battles they fight or trials they overcome. The first man (like the first woman) was created in God's image (Gen. 1:26-27), and was given specific responsibilities (Gen. 2:15-18). God created the man to be in a relationship with Him, to think and act in ways that conform to His character. Man was also created to be in a relationship with a woman (Gen. 2:21-25). However, since the historical fall (Gen. 3:1-7), manhood has been diminished and perverted, as men seek to define themselves independently of God and contrary to His original design. The world has many worthless men (Deut. 13:13; Prov. 6:12-14; 16:27-28), and some have perverted their relationship with women (Lev. 18:22; 20:13; Rom. 1:24-32; 1 Cor. 6:9-10). But the godly man delights himself in the ways of the Lord (Ps. 1:1-3), loves his wife (Eph. 5:25; Col. 3:19), walks humbly, and pursues righteousness, justice and love (Ps. 132:9; Mic. 6:8; Tit. 2:11-12).

There is no greater expression of manhood than the Lord Jesus Christ. The eternal Son of God became a man (John 1:1, 14), manifested grace (John 1:17), lived holy (John 6:69; Heb. 7:26), faced adversity with Scripture (Matt. 4:1-11), and perpetually pleased His Father (John 8:29). He came not to be served, "but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45). He always spoke truth, both strong and gentle (Matt. 23:13-39; John 8:1-11), even in the face of hostility (John 8:40). He

What Does it Mean to be a Man?

welcomed children (Matt. 19:13-14), cared for the sick (Matt. 8:14-16; 14:14), fed the hungry (Mark 6:35-44), and made the humble feel loved and forgiven (Luke 7:36-50). The King of kings and Lord of lords manifested Himself as the Servant of servants when He humbled Himself and washed the feet of His disciples that they might learn humility (John 13:1-17). By the end of His earthly life He'd completed His Father's work, saying, "I glorified You on the earth, having accomplished the work which You have given Me to do" (John 17:4), then He faced the cross and laid down His life for others (John 10:11, 15, 17; 1 Cor. 15:3-4). The Giver of life has given His life that others might know His Father's love (1 John 3:16).

A man, in the biblical sense, is a man who models his life after Christ. He is a Christian in the fullest sense of the word. He is, first and foremost, in a relationship with *the Man*, the Lord Jesus Christ, and has been born again into a new life (1 Pet. 1:3). He puts on "a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience" (Col. 3:12), and denies "ungodliness and worldly desires" and lives "sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age" (Tit 2:12). He continually studies Scripture in order to live God's will (2 Tim. 2:15; 1 Pet. 2:2; 2 Pet. 3:18), and strives toward spiritual maturity (2 Tim. 3:16-17; Eph. 4:11-16). He regards others as more important than himself, and looks out for the interests of others (Phil. 2:3-4). He is filled with the Spirit (Eph. 5:18), and walks in the Spirit (Gal. 5:16). He lives in fellowship with God (1 John 1:5-7), trusting Him to guide and sustain him in all things. His life is being transformed, to think and act less like the world (Rom. 12:1-2), and conform to the image of the One who saved him (Rom. 8:29). He does not love the world (1 John 2:15-17), but shows gracious love to his enemies who

What Does it Mean to be a Man?

live in the world (Matt. 5:43-45; Rom. 12:19-21). He shows love within the body of Christ (1 Thess. 4:9; 1 John 3:23), and helps the needy, widows and orphans (Jam. 1:27). As a son, he honors his father and mother (Eph. 6:1-3), as a husband, he loves his wife as Christ loves the church, providing, protecting, and honoring her always (Eph. 5:25; Col. 3:19; 1 Pet. 3:7), and as a father, he teaches his children the ways of the Lord (Eph. 6:4; cf. Deut. 6:5-7). These are not all of the characteristics of the mature Christian man, but they are among the most important.

What Does it Mean to be a Man?

Wrestling with God

Wrestling with God

God blesses and disciplines. He comforts and corrects. He meddles in our affairs. He never leaves us alone. Why should He? He loves us too much to leave us where we are. He wants the best in us and from us. He wants to mature us. Sometimes we resist Him, like a child wanting our own way; we fight Him, thinking we know best. I'm talking about believers. I'm talking about myself.

Jacob was a man with a strong will. His name in Hebrew means *heel grabber*, or *supplanter*. Jacob's life had been marked by self-reliance as he supplanted others for selfish ends. He wanted his way and pushed to get it by whatever means necessary (read Gen. 25-36). God permitted Jacob to have his way for much of his life, but there were turning points where God humbled His servant. Genesis 32 records a turning point where God physically crippled and mentally humbled Jacob.

Now he arose that same night and took his two wives and his two maids and his eleven children, and crossed the ford of the Jabbok.²³ He took them and sent them across the stream. And he sent across whatever he had.²⁴ Then Jacob was left alone, and a man [*theophany* - God in human form] wrestled with him until daybreak.²⁵ When he saw that he had not prevailed against him, he touched the socket of his thigh; so the socket of Jacob's thigh was dislocated while he wrestled with him [God crippled Jacob for life].²⁶ Then he said, "Let me go, for the dawn is breaking." But he said, "I will not

Wrestling with God

let you go unless you bless me.”²⁷ So he said to him, “What is your name?” And he said, “Jacob.”²⁸ He said, “Your name shall no longer be Jacob, but Israel [Heb. *God fights*]; for you have striven with God and with men and have prevailed.”²⁹ Then Jacob asked him and said, “Please tell me your name.” But he said, “Why is it that you ask my name?” And he blessed him there.³⁰ So Jacob named the place Peniel [Heb. *face of God*], for *he said*, “I have seen God face to face, yet my life has been preserved.” (Gen. 32:22-30)

Jacob fought a “man” that night, not realizing he was wrestling with God (Gen. 32:28-30). It was God—in human form—who started the fight, and Jacob might have declined the match if he had actually known his opponent. Jacob was accustomed to defeating others, but he lost this time. He lost in a way that together hurt and helped him. He was both crippled and blessed by his Victor. Jacob limped away a better man.

Jacob memorialized the place where God changed his life. He called it “Peniel”, which in Hebrew means “the Face of God.” He knew, deep down inside that his encounter with God could have ended his life, and in humility said, “I have seen God face to face, yet my life has been preserved” (Gen. 32:30).

I think the fight shows something about God and believers and the way we are with each other. God sometimes cripples us before He blesses us, and sometimes we fight with God before we realize He’s on our side to help us. We can be so stubborn at times!

You Fight Like you Train

You Fight Like you Train

The character of a person is sometimes measured by the difficulties he overcomes. The warrior by his battle victories, the runner by his long races, or the climber by the mountains he summits. Of course, we all fight battles, run races, and climb mountains in our own lives. Sometimes these are not physical, but mental, emotional or even spiritual.

Great victories are not accomplished overnight but require time, discipline and training. There's a saying among warriors that *you fight like you train*. From that maxim comes the cliché, *the more you sweat in training, the less you'll bleed in battle*. We all struggle in different arenas almost every day, so the concept of fighting should not be reduced to military combat or a boxing ring. The nurse's ability to fight and save lives depends on her years of academic and practical training which prepared her for the conflicts she faces in the emergency room as sick and wounded come in for medical treatment. The lawyer's ability to fight in the courtroom depends on the years of training she received in law school as well as the training she gleaned from years of personal experience in the courtroom itself.

Every Christian is born on a spiritual battlefield. It is the devil's world, and Satan "prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour" (1 Pet. 5:8). The Christian is called to resist the devil by faith, trusting God at His Word (1 Pet. 5:9). This means learning God's Word and consciously applying it to everyday situations. It is through everyday practice that the Christian becomes

You Fight Like you Train

proficient in applying God's Word to his life, as it addresses marriage, raising children, friendships, social issues, finances, law, and other aspects of human life and experience. We cannot always predict the difficulties we'll face in life, and certainly we cannot always stop or avoid them, but we need not be overrun by them either, as we can be mentally prepared to stand firm in the faith. The daily practice of learning and living God's Word prepares the Christian for challenges, in whatever form they take, whether prosperity or adversity (Phil. 4:11-13). I say *prosperity or adversity*, because one can destroy the Christian as easily as the other. The first is a pleasant distraction while the other a difficult one. Both can be used by Satan to get the believer to focus more on the things of this world rather than God. Spiritual victory demands focus on God and His Word, otherwise defeat is inevitable.

When confronted with a crisis, the mind can be shocked and want to shut down due to sensory overload, but this is the time when the Christian should be the thinking on Scripture. Failure to respond properly in a crisis can result in being a casualty rather than a victor. The repetition of daily reading and thinking on Scripture helps ingrain God's Word for when the Christian needs it most during a trial. Constant exposure and repetition to Scripture is the key to learning, and we know we've truly learned something when we can apply it when under pressure. The time we spend reading the Bible, studying under a good Pastor-Teacher, reading good Christian books, and engaging in good theological discussions all prepare us for when the disaster strikes. I speak with certainty on this point, for if one lives long enough, trials will come. I know Christians who collapse under minor disturbances such as changes in the weather,

You Fight Like you Train

burned food, or a flat tire. Because these Christians have failed to handle life's little battles, they've set themselves up for major failure when the big storms of life come their way. This need not happen. The Christian can train his mind daily to think on Scripture and to apply it to the various situations that come his way. As we grow spiritually over time, our little faith will become big faith, and little victories will lead to bigger victories in the Lord.

The storms of life are inevitable, but how we face them is optional. As Christians, we have a choice to live by faith and apply God's Word to our situations. We do not always have control over the things that happen to us, but neither do we have to be controlled by them. As Christians, we always want to "walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, [and] to please *Him* in all respects" (Col. 1:10). By faith we can face a conflict, an injustice, or a hurt done to us, and be the winner because we handled it in a way that pleases the Lord. The life of faith always pleases God (Rom. 10:17; 2 Cor. 5:7-9; Heb. 11:6).

God is always with us. He never leaves or fails us. He is our Lord and He loves us more than we will ever know, even when the battle rages and it seems we are fighting longer than we can endure. We cannot fail, and the Lord will see us through us through it.

You Fight Like you Train

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