

Soteriology—The Doctrine of Salvation

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Soteriology—The Doctrine of Salvation

I. Introduction

In the accomplishment of redemption, all the redemptive events do not occur at one time. God chose the line of Seth to be the progenitor of the godly line of believers from Adam. He chose Noah to replenish the human race after the flood. He chose Abraham as the covenant head of the Jewish nation from whom would come the Messiah who would give his life as an atonement for the believing remnant of Israel and for all who would have a share in the faith of Abraham. He chose Moses to deliver Israel from Egypt, Joshua to conquer most of Canaan, and David to establish the kingdom of Israel, making way for the coming of the Christ. Just as there are steps in the accomplishment of redemption, there are also steps in the application of redemption.

II. Biblical Argument for the *Ordo Salutis*—Order of Salvation

In his work, *Redemption Accomplished and Applied*, pp. 79-87, John Murray lays out a very convincing Biblical argument for a precise order in the application of redemption. The following discussion summarizes this argument and provides some additional observations.

The application of redemption should not be thought of as “one simple and indivisible act” but is a “series of acts and processes.” Theologians commonly use the following terms for this series: calling, regeneration, justification, adoption, sanctification, and glorification. These may also be divided further, or they may even be combined in some cases. We will leave their precise definitions for later. For now, we are primarily concerned about the order in which they occur.

One may question whether there is any benefit in determining their precise order since they are all components of a singular redemption. Are we not straining gnats from our tea to attempt to discover how God applied redemption to the human heart? Two answers may be given to this question. *First*, redemption is the crowning achievement of God, and is the antitype of the physical creation of the world which is its type. We have no difficulty at all in gazing in wonderment at the physical creation with its magnitude of diversity and beauty. It is one creation, but there are many parts to appreciate which the physical eyes can behold and scarcely miss. On the other hand, the spiritual re-creation in Christ (redemption) is not in the least sense inferior to the majesty and splendor of the creation of the world. The new creation is the end-goal to which the physical creation points.

For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us.¹⁹ For the anxious longing of the creation [*ktisis*] waits eagerly for the revealing of the sons of God.²⁰ For the creation [*ktisis*] was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it, in hope²¹ that the creation [*ktisis*] itself also will be set free from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God.²² For we know that the whole creation [*ktisis*] groans and suffers the pains of childbirth together until now.²³ And not only this, but also we ourselves, having the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting eagerly for *our* adoption as sons, the redemption of our body. (Rom. 8:18-23 NASB)

Therefore if anyone is in Christ, *he is* a new creature [*or “creation”; ktisis*]; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come. (2 Cor. 5:17 NASB)

For neither is circumcision anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation [*ktisis*]. (Gal. 6:15 NASB)

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation [*ktisis*].¹⁶ For by Him all things were created, *both* in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things have been created through Him and for Him.¹⁷ He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together.¹⁸ He is also head of the body, the church; and **He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead**, so that He Himself will come to have first place in everything. (Col. 1:15-18 NASB)

For it was the *Father's* good pleasure for all the fullness to dwell in Him,²⁰ and through Him to reconcile all things to Himself, having made peace through the blood of His cross; through Him, *I say*, whether things on earth or things in heaven. (Col. 1:19-20 NASB)

"To the angel of the church in Laodicea write: The Amen, the faithful and true Witness, **the Beginning of the creation [*ktisis*] of God**, says this: (Rev. 3:14 NASB)

John to the seven churches that are in Asia: Grace to you and peace, from Him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven Spirits who are before His throne,⁵ and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, **the firstborn of the dead**, and the ruler of the kings of the earth. To Him who loves us and released us from our sins by His blood-- (Rev. 1:4-5 NASB)

There is far too much rich Christology in these verses to treat here, but the general gist of Paul's teaching in Romans and Colossians, as well as the Revelation of John, is that Jesus is the new **beginning** of the new **creation** of God, the Church, as well as the beginning of the new restored creation. It cannot be true that Christ is Himself a created being since He is also **the image of the invisible God** and since **by Him all things were created...through Him and for Him**.

...the titles in [Rev.] 3: 14 do not link Jesus to the original creation, but are an interpretation of Jesus' resurrection drawn from [Rev. 1: 5] His resurrection is viewed as the beginning of the *new* creation, which is parallel with Col. 1: 15b, 18b; cf. "first-born of all creation"...in Col. 1: 15b, which may refer to the original creation in Genesis, and "the beginning, the firstborn from the dead" in v. 18b...The latter phrase refers to the resurrection as a new cosmic beginning (as evident from the link not only with Col. 1: 15-17 but also with 1: 19-20, 23). This is parallel with 2 Cor. 5: 15, 17, where Paul understands Jesus' resurrection as bringing about a "new creation"...

The conclusion that the title "beginning of the creation of God" in [Rev] 3: 14 is an interpretative development of "firstborn of the dead" from [Rev.] 1: 5 is confirmed by the observation that ... "beginning"...and "firstborn" are generally related in meaning and especially are used together almost synonymously in Col. 1: 18b...of Christ's sovereign position in the new age, as a result of the resurrection. (G.K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, p. 298).

As the types of the OT are always superseded in glory by their NT antitypes, we may say that the new creation supersedes the physical creation in splendor and glory. But contrary to the visibility of the physical creation, the application of redemption is presently invisible to the human eye and must be seen through the eyes of faith as the Scriptures are unfolded. *Second*, the student will see from the following discussion that Scripture is not silent on the order of the application of redemption. A certain order of events is certainly implied in Romans 8: 28-30, a passage which we will explore later, and if a certain order is implied in Scripture, the Bible student is obligated to discern this order and the reason for it. As Murray insists, "God is not the author of confusion

and therefore he is the author of order. There are good and conclusive reasons for thinking that the various actions of the application of redemption...take place in a certain order, and that order has been established by divine appointment, wisdom, and grace” (*Redemption Accomplished and Applied*, p. 80).

A. John 3: 3-8

Jesus answered and said to him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God."⁴ Nicodemus said to Him, "How can a man be born when he is old? He cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born, can he?"⁵ Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit he cannot enter into the kingdom of God."⁶ "That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit."⁷ "Do not be amazed that I said to you, 'You must be born again.'⁸ "The wind blows where it wishes and you hear the sound of it, but do not know where it comes from and where it is going; so is everyone who is born of the Spirit." (Jn. 3:3-8 NASB)

The seeing and entering of the kingdom of God mentioned by Jesus in His conversation with Nicodemus certainly belong to the application of redemption. Without being born again (regeneration), one cannot enter this kingdom. It should be noticed that being born again is logically prior to seeing and entering this kingdom and is the precondition of the latter. The sinner does not see and enter the kingdom of God (which we may call repentance and faith) in order to be born again, but he is born again as the necessary precondition of seeing and entering. Thus, we may conclude that regeneration comes before repentance and faith. (More will be said about this passage later under the heading of regeneration.)

B. 1 John 3: 9

No one who is born of God practices sin, because His seed abides in him; and he cannot sin, because he is born of God. (1 Jn. 3:9 NASB)

In this verse, being born of God is the necessary precondition of being delivered from the power of sin (a process called sanctification). This person cannot sin habitually as a way of life (the meaning implied in the verb tense) “because he is born of God.” He is not delivered from the power of sin in order to be born of God, but vice versa (the other way around). He is born of God in order to be delivered from reigning sin in his life. The order of priority, then, is the new birth followed by the process of sanctification. The practicality of this order is seen in people who wish to be saved by good works. If only they can improve their lives to some acceptable degree of purity, they will become Christians. The folly of this belief is obvious to any who understand the Christian faith. Moral improvement is impossible apart from the new birth (see my commentary on Romans 6).

C. John 1: 12

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, (Jn. 1:12 NASB)

Two main ideas dominate this text: the reception of Christ and the bestowing of authority upon those who receive Him. The reception of Christ is by *faith*, and the bestowing of the authority to become the children of God is called *adoption*. The logical priority is the receiving of Christ by

faith followed by adoption into the family of God—the bestowment of authority (“right”) to become the children of God. No one can be called a child of God without first receiving Christ by faith; therefore, the one must come before the other.

D. Ephesians 1: 13

In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation—having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise, (Eph. 1:13 NASB)

The logical order found in this passage is the hearing of the gospel followed by the believing of the gospel, after which the believing individual is **sealed** with the Holy Spirit of promise. There can be no sealing of the Spirit without the individual first having believed the gospel.

Careful consideration of the texts presented thus far should convince us that the divine order in the application of redemption is based on exegesis (analysis of the texts) and not on “empty logic.”

E. Romans 8: 29-30

For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined *to become* conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren;³⁰ and these whom He predestined, He also **called**; and these whom He called, He also **justified**; and these whom He justified, He also **glorified**. (Rom. 8:29-30 NASB)

In v. 29, two redemptive acts are mentioned which occurred before God created the world. Since they are pre-creation, they are not part of the order of salvation in applied redemption.

Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly *places* in Christ,⁴ **just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world**, that we would be holy and blameless before Him. In love⁵ He **predestined** us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will, (Eph. 1:3-5 NASB)

In Rom. 8: 30, three separate acts of the application of redemption are mentioned—calling, justification, and glorification, in that order. Do we know for sure that this order is intended by the Apostle Paul, or could he just as well have mentioned these acts in a different order? Even if justification had been mentioned before calling, the main thought of the passage would have not been altered. The main thought of the passage is the connection of calling, justification, and glorification with the eternal purpose of God expressed in His foreknowledge and predestination. What we see in this verse is an unbreakable chain of events which originates in the foreknowledge of God and ends with the glorification of the Christian in the new heavens and earth at the consummation. Notice that there is none lost from the beginning of the process to the end. All those who are foreknown and predestined are also called, justified, and glorified. There is absolutely no attrition (loss) of Christians at any step in the process. We may ask, why?

The reason is found earlier in the passage beginning with the intercession of the Spirit in vv. 26 and 27. The Spirit is interceding for us with “groanings too deep for words.” But further, the blessings of calling, justification, and glorification which flow to the Christian in this passage constitute an unbroken chain from cause to effect. The ultimate cause is God, or more specifically, the purpose of God directed to all who love Him and are called according to His purpose. For these individuals, every single event of their lives is designed and ordered by God to “work

together for [their] good.” It is appropriate at this point to ask what this “good” is. The answer is not far away in v. 29 in which Paul says that all those who are foreknown by God are predestined to be conformed to the image of His son. The “good”, then, is conformity to the image of Christ, or sanctification, which is God’s purpose for everyone who loves Him and is called. Because of the connection between v. 29 and v. 30, we may safely assume that those who are foreknown and predestined in v. 29 are the same as those who love God and are called according to His purpose in v. 28.

Having stated the ultimate purpose of God for the believer, sanctification, Paul proceeds in v. 30 to list some of the steps leading irreversibly and unimpeded (unstopped) to this purpose. All of the steps are not mentioned, only three. Nevertheless, we are warranted to believe that all the steps are comprehended by the apostle in these three. When we study the steps in the *ordo salutis* (order of salvation) in detail, we will appreciate the logical order presented here. The last step mentioned is glorification, the comprehensive goal and completion of God’s purpose in salvation. In glorification, the believer—who has been perfectly sanctified at death—will now receive his transformed body in the likeness of Christ’s body transformed at His resurrection.

The purpose of God for every believer comes before our calling, justification, and glorification and serves as the pattern by which these three acts take place. We may think of God’s purpose, which is expressed in foreknowledge and predestination, as the blueprint and plans of a building while calling, justification, and glorification is the building itself. The building is constructed in accordance to the blueprint and not vice versa. The blueprint is not drawn up *after* the building is completed but long *before*, and it gives direction to the intricate details of the building’s construction. In the same way, God is constructing the life of every believer according to His foreknowledge and predestinating purpose to make the believer holy as He Himself is holy.

To continue the analogy, when the shell of a building is first constructed, it doesn’t look very pretty. The floors are bare and dirty from construction materials. Plumbing pipes and electrical wires are exposed and dangling everywhere with no seeming purpose. The building is unpainted and unfinished. But when the finishing touches are applied, its glory is finally unveiled. There is much about our lives which doesn’t look too pretty, and the lives of those who come to Christ later in life look like a dirty construction zone much of their time on earth. Nevertheless, God’s predestinating purpose (the blueprint) is being carried out on schedule for every particular individual and will not be frustrated. When God starts building, He never has to stop due to lack of funds or ability.

*For I am confident of this very thing, that He who **began** a good work in you **will perfect** it until the day of Christ Jesus. (Phil. 1:6 NASB)*

Throughout this mortal life, He will be continuing this building and improving it; and it will never be completed in the present age. When we die and go to be with the Lord in heaven, He will put His finishing touches on our sanctification; and when the Lord returns at the consummation of the age, our bodies will also be perfected in glorification along with every other believer. The Apostle John assures us,

Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we shall be. We know that, when He appears, we shall be like Him, because we shall see Him just as He is (1 Jn. 3: 2 NASB).

Thus far we have not established the fact that calling comes before justification, but since foreknowledge and predestination are considered first and glorification last, we are justified in saying that Paul would not depart from the logical order which he began in the passage. Calling comes before justification.

F. Romans 1: 16-17; 3:21-22, 26, 28, 30; 5: 1; Gal. 2: 16; 3: 24; Phil. 3: 9

For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.¹⁷ For in it *the righteousness [dikaiosune]* of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, "BUT THE RIGHTEOUS *man* SHALL LIVE BY FAITH." (Rom. 1:16-17 NASB)

But now apart from the Law *the righteousness [dikaiosune]* of God has been manifested, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets,²² even *the righteousness* of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all those who believe; for there is no distinction; (Rom. 3:21-22 NASB)

for the demonstration, *I say*, of His righteousness [dikaiosune] at the present time, so that He would be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus. (Rom. 3:26 NASB)

For we maintain that a man is justified [dikaiōō] by faith apart from works of the Law. (Rom. 3:28 NASB)

since indeed God who will justify [dikaiōō] the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith is one. (Rom. 3:30 NASB)

Therefore, having been justified [dikaiōō] by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, (Rom. 5:1 NASB)

nevertheless knowing that a man is not justified [dikaiōō] by the works of the Law but through faith in Christ Jesus, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, so that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the Law; since by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified. (Gal. 2:16 NASB)

Therefore the Law has become our tutor *to lead us* to Christ, so that we may be justified [dikaiōō] by faith. (Gal. 3:24 NASB)

More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ,⁹ and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness [dikaiosune] of my own derived from *the Law*, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness [dikaiosune] which *comes* from God on the basis of faith, (Phil. 3:8-9 NASB)

The Biblical record testifies that “we are justified by faith, from faith, through faith, and upon faith.” It should be noted that the words **justify** and **righteousness** in the Greek language are taken from the same root word. To justify the sinner is simply to make him righteous or to declare him to be righteous before God. If faith is the instrument through which or by which God declares one to be righteous or justified, then it would naturally follow that faith is prior to justification.

Another reason Murray gives for putting faith before justification is that calling comes before justification (Rom. 8: 30). This calling is the divine call of God to the sinner by means of the Holy Spirit through which He draws and persuades the sinner to come to Him in faith. Faith is the

response of the sinner to this calling. Although faith is not the same thing as calling, its connection with calling is inevitable because of the sovereign will of God in producing the desired result of calling, namely faith. Therefore, because of this immediate and inevitable connection between calling and faith, and because calling is before justification, then faith must also come before justification.

Thus far in the order of the application of redemption, we have calling, faith, justification, and glorification. Where does regeneration (being born again) fit into the *ordo salutis*? Does it come before calling? Though he recognizes arguments which could be used in favor of regeneration coming before calling, Murray places it after calling. He does not present a specific proof text, but argues that the emphasis in Scripture is placed upon calling “as that act of God whereby sinners are translated from darkness to light and ushered into the fellowship of Christ.” It is in God’s sovereign call of the sinner from darkness to light which marks the beginning of salvation “in actual possession,” thus the priority of order is given to the call and not to regeneration. (More will be said about this later, but it should be noted that the Westminster Confession of Faith treats calling and regeneration together and not separately.)

So then, we now have calling, regeneration, faith, justification, and glorification. “The other steps [in the *ordo salutis*] can be readily filled in and put in their proper place. Repentance is the twin sister of faith—we cannot think of the one without the other, and so repentance would be conjoined [put together] with faith. Conversion is simply another name for repentance and faith conjoined and would therefore be enclosed in repentance and faith.” Thus we now have calling, regeneration, conversion (or repentance and faith together), justification, and glorification.

To this sequence we add adoption, the bestowing of authority to become the children of God. From John 1: 12 we concluded that adoption must come after receiving Christ by faith. (See that discussion above.) The question would be whether adoption would come *before* justification or *after* justification. The logical order would be justification *before* adoption for the simple reason that one cannot be adopted into the family of God before he is accepted by God as forgiven. Murray gives no specific text in proof of this order, but one can be found if we accept the logical and exegetical implications of the text. In Romans 5: 1 Paul proclaims, “Therefore having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.” As we have seen from this text, faith comes before justification and is the instrumental means of justification.

The verb form, **having been justified**, is an aorist participle which most likely functions as an *instrumental participle* indicating “the means by which the action of the main verb is accomplished (Dana and Mantey, *A Manual Grammar of the Greek New Testament*, p.228). The main verb in the sentence is the verb, **have**. We may translate the verse accordingly, “Therefore *by means of* having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.” This construction sounds awkward, but the more precise meaning is conveyed by it. We learn further that the aorist tense of the participle in this verse indicates “antecedent action relative to the main verb...” (Dana and Mantey, p.230). In other words, the action of being justified comes *before* the action of the main verb, **we have peace with God**. We are logically consistent to assume that having peace with God is one aspect of the benefits of adoption. God does not adopt someone into His family with whom He is still angry. Thus, we are first justified (declared righteous by God) and then adopted into His family as those who are at peace with God.

It is arguable that adoption is the highest privilege of God's people (See J. I. Packer, *Knowing God*, p. 186, quoted in Henry Krabbendam, unpublished class notes on "Christian Doctrine", p. 123). As Packer points out, the new covenant name for God is "Father", and our relationship to God as our father is a good measure of our understanding of the Christian faith (pp. 181-186). It follows then, that the sonship implied in adoption is not merely a step in the order of salvation, but the very foundation of everything else which follows—sanctification, perseverance, and glorification. As sons, we are sanctified (set apart) for the special privilege of being disciplined by a loving father who knows what is best for His children.

For consider Him who has endured such hostility by sinners against Himself, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart. ⁴You have not yet resisted to the point of shedding blood in your striving against sin; ⁵and you have forgotten the exhortation which is addressed to you as sons, "MY SON, DO NOT REGARD LIGHTLY THE DISCIPLINE OF THE LORD, NOR FAINT WHEN YOU ARE REPROVED BY HIM; ⁶FOR THOSE WHOM THE LORD LOVES HE DISCIPLINES, AND HE SCOURGES EVERY SON WHOM HE RECEIVES." (Heb. 12:3-6 NASB)

My son, do not reject the discipline of the LORD Or loathe His reproof, ¹²For whom the LORD loves He reproves, Even as a father *corrects* the son in whom he delights. (Prov. 3:11-12 NASB)

"Behold, how happy is the man whom God reproves, So do not despise the discipline of the Almighty. ¹⁸"For He inflicts pain, and gives relief; He wounds, and His hands *also* heal. (Job 5:17-18 NASB)

We persevere because our Father cannot cast off His children, and He will not allow us to fall away and be eternally lost. By the same reasoning our glorification is certain because as sons of God we are predestined to share in the inheritance of Jesus Christ with Whom we are united.

Although it is difficult to place adoption, it appears that the only likely place to put it is after justification and before sanctification. Thus we now have calling, regeneration, conversion (repentance and faith), justification, adoption. This leaves us with the placement of *sanctification* which is the process whereby the believer is brought into conformity with the moral perfection of Christ. Sanctification can be subdivided into *definitive* sanctification and *progressive* sanctification (See John Murray, *Collected Writings*, Vol. 2, chapters 21 and 23).

Sanctification is a process that begins...in regeneration, finds its basis in justification, and derives its energizing grace from the union with Christ which is effected in effectual calling. Being a continuous process rather than a momentary act like calling, regeneration, justification and adoption, it is proper that it should be placed after adoption in the order of application (*Redemption Accomplished and Applied*, p. 87).

In other words, while definitive sanctification is present in regeneration as the believer is "set apart" for holiness, this sanctification is not complete in regeneration but continues throughout his life as progressive sanctification until he is at home with the Lord. It is in progressive sanctification after adoption that the believer receives the primary benefits of the Father's care in which He disciplines the believer as a father disciplines his son. Discipline is the main subject of the first half of Heb. 12 which finds its purpose in the experiential sanctification of the believer. It could

accurately be said that sanctification, as God’s ultimate purpose for the believer, pervades (spreads throughout) the entire order of salvation from regeneration to death.

Perseverance, the continuation of the believer in faith, repentance, and obedience, occurs at the same time as progressive sanctification and serves to complete the meaning of sanctification. Thus considered, it “might conveniently be placed either before or after sanctification.” This leaves us one concept, *union with Christ*, which is not an actual step in the application of redemption, but rather “the central truth of the whole doctrine of salvation not only in its application but also in its once-for-all accomplishment in the finished work of Christ” (*Redemption Accomplished and Applied*, p. 161). As such, union with Christ “underlies every step of the application of redemption.”

The order of salvation (order of the application of redemption) as we shall discuss it in the following pages is then:

- 1. Calling**
- 2. Regeneration**
- 3. Repentance and Faith (conversion)**
- 4. Justification**
- 5. Adoption**
- 6. Sanctification**
- 7. Perseverance and Preservation**
- 8. Glorification**

Union with Christ underlines all eight of these steps but will be covered only in conjunction with sanctification.

III. The Order of Salvation

A. Effectual Calling

Question 31 of the Westminster Shorter Catechism asks the question: What is effectual calling? The answer it gives to this question is the following:

Effectual calling is the work of God’s Spirit, whereby, convincing us of our sin and misery, enlightening our minds in the knowledge of Christ, and renewing our wills, he doth persuade and enable us to embrace Jesus Christ freely offered to us in the gospel.

1. Distinguished from Universal Call

The terms which are used are significant—*effectual* calling. In being effectual, it is distinguished from the *universal* call of the gospel in which even the non-elect hear the message of salvation but are not convinced of their sin or of their need for salvation. The gospel is preached to millions each year, many of whom are members of evangelical churches, upon whom it has no positive effect, only the negative effect of hardening those who hear it.

For we are a fragrance of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing;¹⁶ to the one an aroma from death to death, to the other an aroma from life to life. And who

is adequate for these things? ¹⁷ For we are not like many, peddling the word of God, but as from sincerity, but as from God, we speak in Christ in the sight of God. (2 Cor. 2:15-17 NASB)

Then He began to denounce the cities in which most of His miracles were done, because they did not repent. ²¹ "Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the miracles had occurred in Tyre and Sidon which occurred in you, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. ²² "Nevertheless I say to you, it will be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon in *the* day of judgment than for you. ²³ "And you, Capernaum, will not be exalted to heaven, will you? You will descend to Hades; for if the miracles had occurred in Sodom which occurred in you, it would have remained to this day. ²⁴ "Nevertheless I say to you that it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in *the* day of judgment, than for you." ²⁵ At that time Jesus said, "I praise You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things from *the* wise and intelligent and have revealed them to infants. ²⁶ "Yes, Father, for this way was well-pleasing in Your sight. ²⁷ "All things have been handed over to Me by My Father; and 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. 11:20-27 NASB)

For indeed we have had good news preached to us, just as they also; but the word they heard did not profit them, because it was not united by faith in those who heard. (Heb. 4:2 NASB)

But as for Israel He says, "ALL THE DAY LONG I HAVE STRETCHED OUT MY HANDS TO A DISOBEDIENT AND OBSTINATE PEOPLE." (Rom. 10:21 NASB)

What then? What Israel is seeking, it has not obtained, but those who were chosen obtained it, and the rest were hardened; ⁸ just as it is written, "GOD GAVE THEM A SPIRIT OF STUPOR, EYES TO SEE NOT AND EARS TO HEAR NOT, DOWN TO THIS VERY DAY." (Rom. 11:7-8 NASB)

One can never hear the gospel without it having an impact upon his life. It is either **an aroma from life to life** or **an aroma from death to death**; but its impact is never neutral, having no impact in either direction. The gospel is the Word of God, and God has said that His word will always accomplish His intentions—whether life or death.

"For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven, And do not return there without watering the earth And making it bear and sprout, And furnishing seed to the sower and bread to the eater; ¹¹ So will My word be which goes forth from My mouth; It will not return to Me empty, Without accomplishing what I desire, And without succeeding *in the matter* for which I sent it. (Isa. 55:10-11 NASB)

In this sense, even the universal call of God is "effectual"—it is effectual for hardening the hearts of those who reject it (Krabbendam, pp. 124-125). Krabbendam departs from the traditional view of universal calling and effectual calling, maintaining that there is only one calling of God with two effects. The effectual calling of the elect to salvation is the same in substance as the effectual calling of the non-elect which hardens them to the gospel.

In summary, while all the called are not chosen (Matthew), all the chosen are called (Romans)...It should be evident that this does not logically imply that the non-elect are never the recipients of what the Bible designates as "calling" (Krabbendam)

The problem I have with Krabbendam's view is the emphasis this view must place upon the passage in Matt. 22: 14, "For many are called, but few are chosen." The contribution of this passage

to the subject of calling is minimal compared to the predominance of passages which almost invariably treat calling as the effectual call to salvation. Murray's comments are well taken.

But it is very striking that in the New Testament the terms for calling, when used specifically with reference to salvation, are almost uniformly applied, not to the universal call of the gospel, but to the call that ushers men into a state of salvation and is therefore effectual. There is scarcely an instance where the terms are used to designate the indiscriminate overture of grace in the gospel of Christ. Hence the all but uniform meaning is that which is fixed by such well-known passages as Romans 8: 30...(Murray, p. 88, emphasis mine).

Another problem is that this view would seem to make the calling mentioned in Romans 8: 30 superfluous (unnecessary) since everyone, non-elect included, is called. If the calling in this passage applies to the non-elect as well as the elect, it would not be included in the unbroken chain of redemption.

Returning to the traditional view, in the universal call, the gospel is preached to all people, young and old, because Christ has told us to do so regardless of the response (Lk. 24: 46-47). The responsibility of being successful in this endeavor is not ours but belongs to God alone. Our responsibility is simply to explain the message of the gospel as clearly and accurately as we can and leave the results to God. We are sent to preach the gospel, not in **cleverness of speech** (1 Cor. 1: 17), that is, not with human wisdom. We are not sent to sell anything as those who **peddle** the word of God for financial gain (2 Cor. 2: 17)—as if the gospel were for sale.

If anyone advocates a different doctrine and does not agree with sound words, those of our Lord Jesus Christ, and with the doctrine conforming to godliness,⁴ he is conceited *and* understands nothing; but he has a morbid interest in controversial questions and disputes about words, out of which arise envy, strife, abusive language, evil suspicions,⁵ and constant friction between men of depraved mind and deprived of the truth, **who suppose that godliness is a means of gain.** (1 Tim. 6:3-5 NASB)

Salvation is free to all who accept it, and we need not withhold the truth about man's sin, misery, and the consequences of unbelief to make the gospel more appealing to resistant hearts. Only God can open men's hearts, and none of our efforts to "sell" the gospel will make our preaching more successful in actually drawing men to the Savior. Such tactics will only fill the churches with people who are "saved" on the throne of their own self-will and idolatry. They will be "Christians" in name only and will serve only to be a thorn in the flesh to elders and a discouragement to church members who truly know Jesus Christ.

2. Effective unto Salvation Because the Work of God

Effectual call is distinguished from universal call. It is effectual in that it actually accomplishes the design of drawing people to Christ. Jesus said,

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

We cannot avoid the implications of this text. Those who are drawn by the Father to the Son are the same who will be raised up on the last day. These are the same people who are given to the Son by the Father and who will most definitely come to the Son for salvation and whom Christ will certainly not cast out.

"All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out.³⁸ "For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me.³⁹ "This is the will of Him who sent Me, that of all that He has given Me I lose nothing, but raise it up on the last day. (Jn. 6:37-39 NASB)

We do not have to leave this text to discover the reason the effectual call is effective unto salvation. It is effective because it is the call of God. Specifically, it is the call of God the Father, therefore, it is inappropriate to ascribe to the Father only the abstract plan of salvation without taking into consideration His work in the actual application of redemption. Other passages indicate the work of the Father in the call of the sinner to repentance and faith.

God is faithful, through whom you were called into fellowship with His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. (1 Cor. 1:9 NASB)

Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord or of me His prisoner, but join with *me* in suffering for the gospel according to the power of God,⁹ **who has saved us and called us** with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was granted us in Christ Jesus from all eternity, (2 Tim. 1:8-9 NASB)

But when God, who had set me apart *even* from my mother's womb and called me through His grace, was pleased¹⁶ to reveal His Son in me so that I might preach Him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately consult with flesh and blood, (Gal. 1:15-16 NASB)

In all these passages, the person of Christ is easily distinguished from the person of the Father, and effectual calling is the work of the Father. Clearly, men do not **call themselves** into the kingdom of God. We do not call ourselves any more than we regenerate, justify, adopt, or glorify ourselves. Salvation is God's work from first to last, including the initiation of this saving work in calling (Murray, pp. 89-90).

The priority of God's will is contrary to the natural disposition of man, who sees within himself all that is essential to respond to the saving work of Christ. We are prone to think that while it was necessary for God to accomplish the work of redemption in the sacrifice of Christ, His work is unnecessary at the point of application. For God to work in our favor despite us—even against our natural disposition—appears to many as a violation of the "free" will of man. We feel slighted at this intrusion. Murray's analysis is poignant.

We may not like this doctrine. But, if so, it is because we are averse [opposed] to the grace of God and wish to arrogate [seize without right] to ourselves the prerogative that belongs to God. And we know where that disposition had its origin (p. 89).

3. The Meaning of Effectual Calling

We are not inclined to think of calling in the same way that the Bible means it. We think of calling as something which we can either accept or reject. However, the Biblical meaning of the word is closer to the idea of summons. When a judge summons a witness to a jury trial, he does not "call" the witness with the faint hope that he will appear in court. Rather, he summons the witness with all the power and authority of a judge who can fine the witness with contempt of court or a jail sentence if he refuses to appear. In the same sense, when God calls us to Himself, He summons us with all the necessary power and authority to deliver us to the intended destination—from darkness

into light (Murray, p. 91). The difference is that the summons of God is not by coercion (force) against our will. When we hear His summons, we irresistibly heed it with our whole heart, mind, will, and emotion. Through the call of God, Christ becomes irresistible to us.

To illustrate, suppose a man meets a woman at work. After weeks of working with this woman, he is not particularly impressed with her personality or her looks. But after a long while, they make an emotional connection with one another when they discover some mutual interests. Afterwards, he begins to seek other opportunities of being with her on a social basis other than work. Their relationship grows until the woman who was unimpressive to him becomes very desirable. He is also amazed at how blind he was in not noticing how beautiful she was when he first met her. After one year, he musters up the courage to ask for her hand in marriage, not because someone was forcing him against his will to marry her, but because she had become irresistible to him. When we first hear the gospel, Christ may appear unimpressive and undesirable, but when God's effectual call comes, Christ becomes irresistible to us through a change in our hearts, minds, wills, and emotions.

It is not accurate to say that God will not save the non-elect even if they want to be saved. The non-elect never receive the effectual call of God which creates within them the desire to be saved. It is also not accurate to say that God will save the elect even if they do not want to be saved. All the elect will in time receive the effectual call and desire to be saved (See also G. I. Williamson, *The Shorter Catechism for Study Classes*, vol. 1, pp.122-123.)

The meaning of this call also includes its *character* (Murray, pp. 91-92). The Christian is called *out of* something *into* something else. When Abraham received the call of God to leave the heathen culture of Ur of the Chaldeans, he was called into fellowship with the living God. Likewise, the Christian is called out of darkness into the marvelous light of the gospel (1 Pet. 2: 9). This means that our fellowship is no longer with the world of darkness but with those who dwell in the light. We are called to be saints, not sinners (Rom. 1: 7), and we should live in such a way that our lives conform to the obligations of saints, to walk worthy of the calling to which we have been called (Eph 4: 1).

If we say that we have fellowship with Him and yet walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth; but if we walk in the light as He Himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin (1 Jn. 1: 6-7).

Effectual calling, therefore, implies the effective transformation of life from habitual sin to habitual righteousness. Otherwise, it would not be effectual.

Effectual calling also implies a calling which is *immutable* (unchangeable) and irreversible (Murray, p. 91). God does not call us into light only to allow us to return to the darkness later. "The gifts and calling of God are irrevocable" (Rom. 11: 29). That is, once granted, they will never be revoked or taken away. Calling is grounded in the sovereign grace of God, and not in the inherent merit of the sinner. There would be no point in effectually calling the sinner out of darkness only later to withdraw the divine influence which keeps him in the light. He did not deserve deliverance from darkness in the first place, and he does not deserve to be sustained by God's grace in righteousness. According to Romans 8: 30, calling is part of the unbreakable chain of salvation which begins with foreknowledge and predestination and ends with glorification. As we have noted, there is no attrition of souls between the beginning and the end. All those who are

foreknown and predestined will be glorified, therefore, it is impossible for those who are called to lose that calling.

Have you ever wondered why some people hear the gospel, believe it, and are transformed by it, while many others hear the same gospel and walk away indifferently? Still others hear it and seem to believe it for a while, but drift back into their old way of life (cf. the parable of the sower; Matt. 13). What makes the difference? The difference is not in the gospel (the seed) or the messenger of the gospel. People who hear the message from the same man at the same worship service will react differently. The difference is also not in the person listening to the gospel. All alike are sinners who are totally depraved and cannot understand spiritual truth (Rom. 3: 10-18; 1 Cor. 2: 14). The total difference is found in the sovereign call of God who raises the spiritually dead to spiritual life (Eph. 2: 1-10). To some He has extended this call, while He has left others in unbelief.

But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised. (1 Cor. 2:14 NASB)

as it is written, "THERE IS NONE RIGHTEOUS, NOT EVEN ONE;¹¹ THERE IS NONE WHO UNDERSTANDS, THERE IS NONE WHO SEEKS FOR GOD;¹² ALL HAVE TURNED ASIDE, TOGETHER THEY HAVE BECOME USELESS; THERE IS NONE WHO DOES GOOD, THERE IS NOT EVEN ONE." (Rom. 3:10-12 NASB)

And you were dead in your trespasses and sins,² in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience.³ Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest.⁴ But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us,⁵ even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), (Eph. 2:1-5 NASB)

B. Regeneration

Contrary to the opinions of most Christians who have come under the dominating influence of Arminianism, repentance and faith do not come next in the order of salvation. It can also be said that these same Christians would equate the effectual call of God with the universal call of God. The majority opinion among believers is that God never shows more favor to some sinners than others. The Scriptures prove otherwise. Some are given by the Father to the Son which sets them apart from those who have not been given to the Son. Of those given to the Son, the Son loses nothing but raises them up at the last day. Moreover, the same number given to the Son are also drawn to the Son by the Father.

"All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out.³⁸ "For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me.³⁹ "This is the will of Him who sent Me, that of all that He has given Me I lose nothing, but raise it up on the last day. (Jn. 6:37-39 NASB)

"But there are some of you who do not believe." For Jesus knew from the beginning who they were who did not believe, and who it was that would betray Him.⁶⁵ 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." (Jn. 6:64-65 NASB)

The effectual calling of the Arminian depends solely on the individual who hears the message and responds to it. It is the universal call made effectual by the sovereign will of the hearer. But this is not the teaching of Scripture which focuses not on the individual, but on God.

The Arminian will also have trouble with the indisputable fact that even the universal call of the gospel does not reach everyone. There are millions in our day who go to their graves without ever hearing the gospel message. How many have heard the gospel in Saudi Arabia, Afghanistan, Libya, and any number of nations whose governments are openly hostile to Christianity? People in these nations are judged according to the standards implied in Romans 1: 18-32—the witness of the being, attributes, and moral standards of God evident in creation. However, they are not judged because they rejected the gospel message which they never heard. Paul declares in Romans 10 that the God-ordained means of hearing the gospel is the messenger sent to preach the gospel.

for "WHOEVER WILL CALL ON THE NAME OF THE LORD WILL BE SAVED." ¹⁴ **How** then will they call on Him in whom they have not believed? **How** will they believe in Him whom they have not heard? And **how** will they hear without a preacher? ¹⁵ **How** will they preach unless they are sent? Just as it is written, "HOW BEAUTIFUL ARE THE FEET OF THOSE WHO BRING GOOD NEWS OF GOOD THINGS!" (Rom. 10:13-15 NASB)

The rhetorical questions in this text demand negative answers. No one can **call** upon the Lord unless he first **believes** in Him. No one will believe in Him unless they have **heard** of Him. No one will hear of Him unless a **preacher** (or **herald**) shares the good news with him. Finally, no one will share this good news unless he is **sent** by the church which takes upon itself the responsibility of missions and evangelism.

The question at this point is: When the call of God goes out, how can it be received by sinners who are **dead in trespasses and sins**, who “[do] not accept the things of the Spirit of God”, who “cannot understand them because they are spiritually appraised” and who are “enemies of God”? It is true that God extends the call to sinners, but as Murray points out, “...it is not God who answers the call; it is the person to whom the call is addressed.” How do we get past this difficulty? How can the sinner respond in repentance and faith in the frightful state of sin and rebellion which dominates his every action and thought? Quoting Murray again,

It is the glory of the gospel of God’s grace that it provides for this incongruity [lack of harmony]. God’s call, since it is effectual, carries with it the operative grace whereby the person called is enabled to answer the call and to embrace Jesus Christ as he is freely offered in the gospel. God’s grace reaches down to the lowest depths of our need and meets all the exigencies [pressing, urgent requirements] of the moral and spiritual impossibility which inheres [exists as a characteristic] in our depravity and inability. And that grace is the grace of regeneration. It is when we take into account God’s recreative power and grace that the contradiction between the call of God and the sinful condition of the called is resolved (p. 96).

1. The Meaning of Regeneration

To understand the meaning of regeneration, it is necessary first to understanding the meaning of *total depravity*. I have covered total depravity under the heading of “Anthropology”. One of the best summaries of total depravity in the OT is found in Genesis 6: 5 just before the flood and in Paul’s letter to the Romans quoted earlier.

Then the Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great on the earth, and **that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually** (Gen. 6: 5 NASB)

as it is written, "THERE IS NONE RIGHTEOUS, NOT EVEN ONE;¹¹ THERE IS NONE WHO UNDERSTANDS, THERE IS NONE WHO SEEKS FOR GOD;¹² ALL HAVE TURNED ASIDE, TOGETHER THEY HAVE BECOME USELESS; THERE IS NONE WHO DOES GOOD, THERE IS NOT EVEN ONE." (Rom. 3:10-12 NASB)

The quote from Rom. 3 is a composite of other OT texts. These statements sound like a strange exaggeration to modern men who attribute to themselves the very best of motives in everything they do. Generally, only overt (outward) actions are evaluated. If a man is not guilty of murder, outright theft, public drunkenness, adultery, and countless other obvious sins, he believes he is generally a good person, particularly if he has a good reputation in the community for being a generous person. The Bible says, "All the ways of a man are clean in his own sight..." (Prov. 16: 2a). What men fail to realize is that an act is only righteous if the motivation producing the act is also righteous. The last part of Prov. 16: 2 reads, "...but the Lord weighs the motives." Jesus told the rich young ruler that there was only One who was good, even God (Matt. 19: 17), which meant that the rich young ruler didn't qualify either, however much he imagined himself as a superlative keeper of the law.

Isaiah 64: 6 says that "...all our righteous deeds are like a filthy garment..." The word for "filthy garment" in the Hebrew denotes (means) the soiled menstrual rags of a woman who is going through her monthly menstrual period. This is all we have by way of "righteousness" in our state of sin; our supposed righteousness is nothing but pollution. Paul says, "... the mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God; for it does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able to do so; and those who are in the flesh [*that is, those who are not saved by faith in Christ*] cannot please God" (Rom. 8: 7-8). Not even our best deeds done in the flesh are pleasing to God because deeds done in the flesh (in a state of sin) are only that—flesh. Further, if those who are in the flesh **cannot please God**, and if faith and repentance are pleasing to God, a fact with which we must all agree, then it follows that those who are in the flesh cannot repent and believe apart from a supernatural act of God upon the heart.

This is what Jesus implies in his conversation with Nicodemus.

⁶ "That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.

The flesh can produce nothing but flesh; it cannot produce the fruits of the Spirit which include repentance, faith, and goodness. Unless we have a settled conviction in our minds that nothing good or pleasing to God can be produced by the unbeliever, not even faith and repentance, we will be unable to understand the concept of regeneration. We will insist that a man is born again *when* he repents and believes, which is essentially the same thing as saying that man is the author of his own rebirth. If the unbeliever (in the flesh) is capable of such things, there is no need of regeneration. Regeneration is the initial renewal of the sinner from being in the flesh to being in the Spirit. Paul says in Rom. 8: 9,

However, **you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit**, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you.

Regeneration consists in the implanting of the principle of the new spiritual life of man, in a radical change of the governing disposition of the soul, which, under the influence of the Holy Spirit, gives birth to a life that moves in a Godward direction. In principle this change affects the whole man; the

intellect, 1 Cor. 2: 14, 15; 2 Cor. 4: 6; Eph. 1: 18; Col. 3: 10; the will, Ps. 110: 3; Phil. 2: 13; 2 Thess. 3: 5; Heb. 13: 21; and the feelings or emotions, Ps. 42: 1, 2; Matt. 5: 4; 1 Pet. 1:8 (Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, p. 468).

It is the reversal of the ravaging and debilitating effects of sin left upon the soul at the fall of man rendering him dead in trespasses and sins—a spiritual corpse. Through regeneration, he is born again from the dead spiritually, and enabled to pursue a course of life which is “Godward”. Recalling the definition of “effectual calling” earlier, it is difficult to distinguish between effectual calling and regeneration.

Effectual calling is the work of God’s Spirit, whereby, convincing us of our sin and misery, enlightening our minds in the knowledge of Christ, and renewing our wills, he doth persuade and enable us to embrace Jesus Christ freely offered to us in the gospel (*Westminster Shorter Catechism*, Question 31).

Berkhof treats effectual calling in the same chapter with regeneration in his *Systematic Theology*, and the *Westminster Confession* and *Shorter Catechism* do not treat the two separately. There is no question in the *Shorter Catechism*: “What is regeneration?”, the framers of this document reasoning that they had adequately dealt with this issue in effectual calling. It could easily be argued that they belong together under one heading. While effectual calling focuses on the *activity of God* in raising the sinner from death to life, regeneration focuses upon the *result of that activity*, namely, the new life-principle itself. The work of God in effectual calling is that of the heart surgeon during the operation. When the operation is completed and the repaired heart begins beating, this is regeneration.

2. John 3: 1-8 and Ezekiel 36: 25-26

The classic text dealing with regeneration is Jesus’ conversation with Nicodemus found in John 3. For further reading see Murray, *Redemption Accomplished and Applied*, pp. 95-105).

Jesus answered and said to him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God."⁴ Nicodemus said to Him, "How can a man be born when he is old? He cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born, can he?"⁵ Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit he cannot enter into the kingdom of God."⁶ "That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit."⁷ "Do not be amazed that I said to you, 'You must be born again.'⁸ "The wind blows where it wishes and you hear the sound of it, but do not know where it comes from and where it is going; so is everyone who is born of the Spirit." (Jn. 3:3-8 NASB)

When Jesus says that **unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God**, the reference is to one’s ability to appreciate and discern the value of the kingdom. Many years ago, I visited an art exhibition featuring the works of Rembrandt, a famous Christian painter of the 1600’s. I stood in awe before masterpieces which were hundreds of years old, but I realized that I could never appreciate them as an artist or as someone who had intensely studied the life and works of Rembrandt. I could see them, but I really couldn’t *see* them. A dog could look at the same masterpieces, but receive no aesthetic gratification at all. To the dog, the work of art would be just an object in front of him with images he would not be able to interpret. The kingdom of God is like this to people who are perishing. They see no beauty in it, no need for it, and have no appreciation for it. They cannot **see** the kingdom of God because they have only been born *once*,

but not *again*. Nicodemus was like that, the reason he was having such trouble understanding Jesus.

It is significant that Jesus uses the analogy of physical birth to explain the miracle of the new birth. In our physical birth, we are totally passive, depending completely on the sexual activity of our mother and father. We take no initiative in our physical birth. We do not decide who our father will be or who our mother will be. We do not decide when we will be born or whether we will be male or female, healthy or well. We do not decide what we will look like or how intelligent we will be. There is absolutely nothing about our physical birth which is left to our will. Moreover, at the moment we exit the birth canal, we respond to our new environment by crying. (It is good that we did not foresee just how difficult life in this world will be. We might attempt to crawl back into our mother's uterus!) Our crying did not give us birth; we cried as a response to our birth. Analogously, repentance and faith are a response to the new birth; they do not cause the new birth.

It is the same with the new birth. We are totally passive. We do not decide when and how the Holy Spirit will act. The **wind** [*pneuma*; the same word as **spirit** in the Greek) blows wherever it wants to and is not at the beck and call of anyone. It cannot be controlled. Likewise, the activity of the Spirit is sovereign and independent of our participation and not under our control, a fact often ignored in modern evangelistic methods seeking to manipulate people into an emotional state encouraging repentance. Forty-five stanzas of *Just As I Am* (a good hymn often unwisely used) or repetitive singing of popular choruses will not obligate or coerce the Spirit to do what He chooses not to do. Nor can we prevent Him from doing what He chooses to do. The sinner is born again wherever, whenever, and however the Spirit pleases or not at all if the Spirit does not wish to regenerate.

Having said that man is *passive*, it would be wrong to infer from this that he is not *responsible*. Jesus told Nicodemus, “**You must be born again**”. Moses commanded the Israelites to circumcise their hearts (Dt. 10: 16). They were not able to do so, but they were *responsible* to do so nevertheless. Regeneration does not occur apart from God's ordained means, but through the means of the gospel proclamation.

Every good thing given and every perfect gift is from above, coming down **from the Father of lights**, with whom there is no variation or shifting shadow.¹⁸ In the exercise of His will He brought us forth **by the word of truth**, so that we would be a kind of first fruits among His creatures. (Jas. 1:17-18 NASB)

for you have been born again not of seed which is perishable but imperishable, *that is*, **through the living and enduring word of God**. (1 Pet. 1:23 NASB)

The Spirit uses the truth in the regenerative process. Regeneration is mediated through the word and Spirit, and does not take place immediately apart from the word and the Spirit. What does Jesus mean by **born of water**? Several explanations have been offered. Born of water may imply the first birth or the physical birth. When a baby is born, it breaks through the amniotic sac, the baby's protective environment which is filled with water before birth. Obviously, one must be born physically before he is born spiritually; so, Jesus makes note of this necessity.

But this interpretation may be too obvious, and it is very unlikely. First, the necessity of physical birth is so self-evident that it is unlikely that Jesus would have wasted any words mentioning it.

Second, **water** is never used in this sense in the Bible. Third, the whole argument is thoroughly modern, and even though Jesus was well aware of human anatomy, His use of this figure of speech would have been totally lost on Nicodemus (James Montgomery Boice, *Foundations of the Christian Faith*, p.405). Fourth, if this phrase refers to physical birth, John would have been contradicting what he said in the first chapter when he said that the children of God **were born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God** (Jn. 1: 13). The phrase, **not of blood** refers to physical birth or human descent, thus the children of God are not born of human descent or the **will of the flesh** (possibly sexual desire) or the **will of man** since man is totally depraved and does not seek after God or comprehend spiritual truth.

Another view is that **water** refers to Christian baptism. This is probably one of the most popular interpretations and is used widely by churches which hold to some form of baptismal regeneration in which the infant is presumed to be regenerate (or is regenerated) at the time of baptism. 1 Pet. 3: 21, has often been pressed into service to support baptismal regeneration.

For Christ also died for sins once for all, *the* just for *the* unjust, so that He might bring us to God, having been put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit; ¹⁹ in which also He went and made proclamation to the spirits *now* in prison, ²⁰ who once were disobedient, when the patience of God kept waiting in the days of Noah, during the construction of the ark, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were brought safely through *the* water. ²¹ Corresponding to that, baptism now saves you—not the removal of dirt from the flesh, but an appeal to God for a good conscience—through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, (1 Pet. 3:18-21 NASB)

The main thrust of Peter's statement is that the water of baptism (the antitype) is like the water of the flood (the type). The words **corresponding to** in the Greek are "antitype" [*antitupos*]. Noah and his family demonstrated their faith in God by entering the ark and being safely transported above the destruction of the flood. As it turned out, while the flood was the means of destruction for unbelievers, it was the means of salvation for Noah—salvation from the evil of a sinful world and God's wrath against it. While the water killed everyone else, it floated the ark to safety. The flood is a type of its antitype which is baptism. In Christian baptism, we enter the "ark" of salvation from the wrath of God and from the evil of this world and are transported by the water of baptism into His grace. But the baptism itself is only the outward expression and not the reality of God's saving grace, even as the flood was the outward expression of God's wrath to sinners and His grace to Noah, but not the wrath and grace itself. God was angry with the world and loved Noah before the flood, but this anger and love found expression in the flood. Likewise, with the believer, he is already in the good grace of God before His baptism, but this grace finds outward expression in baptism. (This explanation does not address the issue of infant baptism, something which Peter does not have in view.)

This explanation is further supported by the next statement in the context. Peter expressly says that the baptism which **saves you is not the removal of dirt from the flesh, but an appeal to God for a good conscience—through the resurrection of Jesus Christ** (v.21). Baptism does not save. It merely represents the appeal of the sinner to God to be saved by the work of Christ climaxed in the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Back to John 3, Jesus does not say "born of baptism" but **born of water**, and we have no justification from the context of the passage in assuming baptism. Jesus was involved with Nicodemus in a dialog about religious matters, and His goal was to communicate as clearly as

possible using terms and figures of speech familiar to Nicodemus and would serve best in conveying to him a profound spiritual truth. Therefore, when He used the word, **water**. Nicodemus was a Pharisee and an expert in the OT; he would be familiar with the prophecy of Ezekiel. In the OT, water represented purification. Entrance into the presence of God in the OT temple required ritual cleansing or purification. Analogously, entrance into the kingdom of God required actual purification from the defilement of sin. Jesus was striking to the very heart of Nicodemus' problem as a Pharisee, his self-righteousness and self-complacency blinding him to his own moral pollution and need for cleansing. Ezekiel 36: 24-26 is the OT parallel of John 3.

"For I will take you from the nations, gather you from all the lands and bring you into your own land.
²⁵ "Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. ²⁶"Moreover, I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. (Ezek. 36:24-26 NASB)

Both passages present two aspects of the new birth—cleansing and **re-creation**. **Born of water** and **born of the Spirit** correspond to **sprinkle clean water on you** and **put a new spirit within you** found in the Ezekiel passage. As a Pharisee, Nicodemus would have been familiar with this promise in Ezekiel; therefore, Jesus rightly questions his confusion about the necessity of the new birth, "**Are you the teacher of Israel and do not understand these things?**" (**Teacher** is accompanied by the definite article "**the**"). Not "a teacher" but **the teacher**. It is a mild rebuke. The change required in John 3 is the same as that which is indicated in Ezekiel, a change which takes into account all the pressing needs of our spiritual decadence (moral corruption) and the demands of a new life lived not in the flesh but in the Spirit. Only this change will solve the problem of the pollution of sin and make fellowship with God possible (Murray, *Redemption Accomplished and Applied*, pp.97-100).

The Greek word for **regeneration** occurs only twice in the NT, and only once does it refer to the new birth of the individual.

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 NASB)

In this text, there is a very clear reference to the spiritual cleansing and renewal which is seen in John 3 and Ezek. 36. **Regeneration** is depicted with the same symbolism—the purification of water and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. This passage further confirms the interpretation of Murray and others that ritual water baptism is not in view in John 3, but spiritual cleansing which requires the operation of the Spirit.

3. 1 John and the Relationship between Regeneration and Conversion

It could be argued that since regeneration comes before faith and repentance, it is possible for a person to be regenerated but not converted. That is, it is conceivable that he could be born again without ever exercising repentance and faith. Murray answers this objection by demonstrating from John's first epistle that regeneration invariably is attended by the other saving graces of God. The Bible knows nothing of regeneration without repentance and faith or without deliverance from the reigning or dominating power of sin (see my commentary on Rom. 6).

No one who is born of God practices sin, because His seed abides in him; and he cannot sin, because he is born of God. (1 Jn. 3:9 NASB)

For whatever is born of God overcomes the world; and this is the victory that has overcome the world— our faith. (1 Jn. 5:4 NASB)

We know that no one who is born of God sins; but He who was born of God keeps him, and the evil one does not touch him. (1 Jn. 5:18 NASB)

When these verses are considered together, we conclude that the regenerate person is delivered from the reigning power of habitual sin. He also overcomes the world of sin and unbelief through his continuing faith in Jesus Christ, a faith that does not quit and is not lost. He is kept safely away from the destructive powers of the devil by a God who keeps him and will not let him go. It is impossible to identify these saving graces accompanying regeneration (**born of God**) as anything other than conversion (repentance and faith) and sanctification. It is, therefore, impossible to experience regeneration without also being converted.

It should be noted that John is not presenting the possibility of sinless perfection in this life. If he were, he would have contradicted himself.

If we say that we have **no sin**, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us.⁹ If we confess our sins, 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**, we make Him a liar and His word is not in us. (1 Jn. 1:8-10 NASB)

In 1 Jn. 5:18, **sins** is an indicative present active verb which may be translated, “keeps on sinning.” In 1 Jn. 3: 9, **practices sin** is also indicative present active, translated in the ESV as **makes a practice of sinning**. There is a difference between reigning sin in the unbeliever and remaining sin in the Christian (see John Murray, *Romans*, chapters 6 and 7).

Regeneration is at the basis of all change in heart and life. It is a stupendous [astounding] change because it is God’s recreative act. A cheap and tawdry [showy] evangelism has tended to rob the gospel which it proclaims of that invincible power which is the glory of the gospel of sovereign grace. May the church come to think and live again in terms of the gospel which is the power of God unto salvation (Murray, p. 105, emphasis his).

Murray is referring to the “cheap grace” often offered to sinners who have not come face to face with the gravity of their defilement and their offense against a holy God. They are encouraged to receive God’s grace without understanding the need to turn from known sin and rebellion. But the only gospel message Jesus authorized was a gospel including repentance.

and He said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Christ would suffer and rise again from the dead the third day,⁴⁷ and that repentance for forgiveness of sins would be proclaimed in His name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem. (Lk. 24:46-47 NASB)

God never saved anyone on a throne of self-worship.

C. Repentance and Faith (Conversion)

1. Repentance

The Westminster Shorter Catechism defines repentance as follows:

WSC 87 What is repentance unto life? A. Repentance unto life is a saving grace,(1) whereby a sinner, out of a true sense of his sin,(2) and apprehension of the mercy of God in Christ,(3) doth, with grief and hatred of his sin, turn from it unto God,(4) with full purpose of, and endeavour after, new obedience.(5) (WSC 1:87 WCS)

As one can see from this definition, repentance is something the sinner does, not what God does. While regeneration is the work of God upon a passive and helpless sinner, repentance is the natural and inevitable response—the new-born baby’s cry—of the sinner to the regenerating work of God through the Holy Spirit.

a. The meaning of repentance—a change of mind...

The Greek word for repentance is *metanoia* which literally means a “change of mind”. This begs the question: a change of mind concerning what? Specifically, it is a change of mind concerning sin, God, ourselves, and righteousness.

(1) ...Concerning Sin

A very clear expression of repentance is found in Ps. 51: 1-3 which is believed to be the occasion of David’s repentance of his sin of adultery with Bathsheba and his murder of Uriah.

For the choir director. A Psalm of David, when Nathan the prophet came to him, after he had gone in to Bathsheba. Be gracious to me, O God, according to Your lovingkindness; According to the greatness of Your compassion blot out my transgressions. ² Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity And cleanse me from my sin. ³ For I know my transgressions, And my sin is ever before me. (Ps. 51:1-3 NASB)

Repentance is not simply a change of mind in general but is a change of mind concerning specific sins in our lives (Murray, p. 114). Acts 2: 37-38 reveals the same meaning of repentance toward the specific sin of crucifying Christ.

"Therefore let all the house of Israel know for certain that God has made Him both Lord and Christ— **this Jesus whom you crucified.**" ³⁷ Now when they heard *this*, they were **pierced to the heart**, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Brethren, what shall we do?" ³⁸ Peter *said* to them, "**Repent**, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. (Acts 2:36-38 NASB)

When Zaccheus was converted, he volunteered half of his possessions to the poor and agreed, without any prompting from Jesus, to return four times as much as he had defrauded (stolen) from others in conformity to the Law of Moses (Ex. 22: 1; 2 Sam. 12: 6).

Zaccheus stopped and said to the Lord, "Behold, Lord, half of my possessions I will give to the poor, and if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I will give back four times as much." ⁹ And Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, because he, too, is a son of Abraham. (Lk. 19:8-9 NASB)

Zaccheus’ repentance was not a vague, generalized understanding of his unworthiness, but the realization of specific infractions of the law of God which he had committed. It was his change of mind about the specific sin of greed and legalized theft through tax fraud which prompted Jesus to

say, “**Today, salvation has come to this house, because he, too, is a son of Abraham,**” an admission that would have scandalized all Pharisees who believed tax collectors beyond the hope of salvation. When many of the Ephesians were converted, they gathered together their magic books totaling 50,000 drachmas (equal to 50,000 days’ wages) and burned them as a sign of repentance toward the specific sin of witchcraft (Acts 19: 18-19. The same repentance is evident in Thessalonica (1 Thess. 1: 9) and with the individual whom Paul delivered over to Satan who repented of his sin of incest with his stepmother (1 Cor. 5; 2 Cor. 2; assuming that Paul is speaking of the same individual).

For they themselves report about us what kind of a reception we had with you, and **how you turned to God from idols** to serve a living and true God, (1 Thess. 1:9 NASB)

But just as there is cheap grace, there is also cheap repentance that doesn’t cost anything. Two African pastors I have worked with—one for six years—have cheated me out of thousands of dollars designated for ministry. One says that he has repented and asked me for forgiveness. I forgave him, but I have sincere doubts about the sincerity of his repentance since he has not offered to pay back anything he stole. This is doubtful repentance. Repentance is a change of mind demonstrated in a change of action resulting from this change of mind. Lacking any restitution, I conclude that there has been no genuine repentance.

(2) ...Concerning God

In repentance, the sinner recognizes that his sin is a direct affront (offense) to a holy and righteous God and a violation of His law. This context of sin against God is the only explanation we have for David’s comment in Ps. 51: 4, “Against Thee, *Thee only*, I have sinned, and done what is evil in Thy sight.” It is a surprising statement since David had also sinned against Bathsheba by seducing her into adultery, and he had conspired successfully to have her husband Uriah and a hundred men with him killed carelessly on the battlefield. How can he say that he had sinned against God and God alone? He can say this precisely because there is no such thing as sin apart from sin against God. The explanation of his statement may be found in Romans 5: 13 in which Paul says that “sin is not imputed when there is no law” and in the famous statement of the Russian philosopher Dostoevsky, “Without God, everything is permissible.” That is, without God, there are no moral absolutes and no right and wrong; therefore, everything is permissible.

When the Apostle Paul met the Lord on the road to Damascus, he was confronted with these words, “**Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?**” When Paul questioned Him about His identity, He repeated, “**I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting.**” Paul was deeply convinced that he was serving Yahweh, the one and only God, by putting Christians in prison. His sin was against them, but Jesus recognized his persecution primarily for what it was, persecution of Him. Jesus reveals the same identity with His people in Matthew 25 when describing the coming of the Son of Man at the final judgment. Those who were too preoccupied with themselves and their own lives to extend kindness to the hungry, the imprisoned, the naked, and the sick, will be face the horrible truth that their callous disregard for others was none other than a callous disregard for the Lord Himself (Matt. 25: 45).

In repentance, we come face to face for the first time with the realization that we have flaunted our sin and our rebellious lives in the face of God, the One who made us and has the power of life and

death over us. Moreover, as we confess our sins daily, we renew our repentance toward God and our faith in Him who alone can save us.

(3) ...Concerning Ourselves

In repentance, we come to the ugly truth about ourselves, that we are not the righteous, noble, generous people that we perceived ourselves to be, but are selfish, self-serving, law-breaking, poison-spewing sinners who deserve the wrath of God.

In the year of King Uzziah's death I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, lofty and exalted, with the train of His robe filling the temple. ²Seraphim stood above Him, each having six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. ³And one called out to another and said, "Holy, Holy, Holy, is the LORD of hosts, The whole earth is full of His glory." ⁴And the foundations of the thresholds trembled at the voice of him who called out, while the temple was filling with smoke. ⁵Then I said, "Woe is me, for I am ruined! **Because I am a man of unclean lips, And I live among a people of unclean lips;** For my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts." ⁶Then one of the seraphim flew to me with a burning coal in his hand, which he had taken from the altar with tongs. ⁷He touched my mouth *with it* and said, "**Behold, this has touched your lips; and your iniquity is taken away and your sin is forgiven.**" (Isa. 6:1-7 NASB)

We may ask why Isaiah draws attention to his **unclean lips**. Perhaps the reason is that our speech is so often the most common outward manifestation of our inward impurity. As James puts it,

For we all stumble in many *ways*. **If anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man,** able to bridle the whole body as well. ³Now if we put the bits into the horses' mouths so that they will obey us, we direct their entire body as well. ⁴Look at the ships also, though they are so great and are driven by strong winds, are still directed by a very small rudder wherever the inclination of the pilot desires. ⁵So also the tongue is a small part of the body, and yet it boasts of great things. See how great a forest is set aflame by such a small fire! ⁶**And the tongue is a fire, the very world of iniquity; the tongue is set among our members as that which defiles the entire body, and sets on fire the course of our life, and is set on fire by hell.** ⁷For every species of beasts and birds, of reptiles and creatures of the sea, is tamed and has been tamed by the human race. ⁸**But no one can tame the tongue; it is a restless evil and full of deadly poison.** ⁹With it we bless *our* Lord and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in the likeness of God; ¹⁰from the same mouth come *both* blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not to be this way. ¹¹Does a fountain send out from the same opening *both* fresh and bitter *water*? ¹²Can a fig tree, my brethren, produce olives, or a vine produce figs? Nor *can* salt water produce fresh. (Jas. 3:2-12 NASB)

With our lips we lie, slander, abuse, tell coarse jokes, assassinate others' character, and tell the truth about others when the truth should not have been told—when we should have remained silent. If we can examine our speech carefully and claim that we are blameless, we have little understanding of ourselves or the law of God.

Jesus required the rich man to leave his riches behind, but he refused and walked away (Matt. 19: 16-24). Jesus did not go running after the man to offer a better bargain, but simply said that it was very difficult for rich men to enter the kingdom of God. Jesus does not require everyone to sell everything they own and follow Him, but He does require a radical departure from idols, the biggest idol being self. In repentance we repudiate our presumed status as gods walking on earth and recognize that there is only one God who has exclusive claim upon our lives. This new

perspective is vividly illustrated in Jesus' parable of the Pharisee and the publican (Luke 18: 9-14). He told this parable, as Luke tells us, **to certain ones who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and viewed others with contempt.** The Pharisee, still enthroned in self-conceit, congratulated himself for outward conformity to the law. He was not a swindler or an adulterer (at least in the outward sense), and he was careful to fast and tithe, claims which Jesus does not deny in the parable. Jesus makes it clear that although the Pharisee believed he was praying to God, he was really praying only **"to himself"** (v. 11). God does not hear such prayers, because there is no repentance in them.

In contrast, Jesus tells us about the tax-collector who was pleading with God in the dust of humility and repentance saying, **"God, be merciful to me, the sinner!"** **"The sinner"** and not "a sinner." (The definite article is used in the Greek text for emphasis.) This publican did not consider himself one sinner among many and, therefore, excusable on that account—"so is everyone else!". He was **the sinner** who stood alone before God and condemned on account of his wicked and rebellious heart. Likewise, Paul, who said toward the end of his distinguished service,

It is a trustworthy statement, deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, **among whom I am foremost of all** (1 Tim. 1: 15).

This should be the ongoing self-evaluation of every true child of God. His first letter to Timothy is written about 63 A.D. In the epistle to the Ephesians, written from a Roman prison possibly a little earlier than 1 Timothy, Paul says,

To me, **the very least of all *saints***, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unfathomable riches of Christ...(Eph. 3: 8).

Still earlier, when writing to the Corinthians about 55 A.D., Paul said,

For I am **the least of the *apostles***, who am not fit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God (1 Cor. 15: 9).

By the time Paul wrote his first letter to Timothy, he had been beaten five times with 39 lashes, three times with rods, stoned once, shipwrecked three times on missionary adventures, spending one day and night floating on the ocean. During his missionary journeys, he had been in danger of starvation, death by freezing, and in danger of thieves (2 Cor. 11: 23-28). Yet after all his efforts and sacrifices as an apostle, his estimation of himself at the end of his life seemed humbler than it was when he began his ministry. As Christ became bigger in Paul's understanding, he became smaller. As the Baptist said, **He must increase, but I must decrease** (Jn. 3: 30).

(4) ...Concerning Righteousness

Repentance is also a change of mind about righteousness. The true believer is one who is no longer trusting in his own righteousness, but the righteousness of God. Trusting in one's own righteousness was the error of the Jewish people, who trusted in their own merits and not those of Christ. Paul laments this fatal error in Romans 10.

For I testify about them that they have a zeal for God, but not in accordance with knowledge.³ For not knowing about God's righteousness and seeking to establish their own, they did not subject themselves to the righteousness of God.⁴ For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone

who believes.⁵ For Moses writes that the man who practices the righteousness which is based on law shall live by that righteousness. (Rom. 10:2-5 NASB)

The passage reveals that there is a distinct difference between man's righteousness based on law-keeping and God's righteousness based on believing. Christ is the end, or goal, of the law for righteousness for everyone who believes in Him. Man's righteousness is self-righteousness, and it presumes to satisfy the holy demands of the law of God relative to (in comparison to) every other sinner. In other words, it mistakenly assumes that since God cannot receive the perfect obedience that He demands, He is willing to accept far less than perfection.

In the US, university professors often grade on a bell curve. When they administer exams which are too difficult for anyone to get an A, they take the highest grade achieved, a B, and promote this grade to an A. But this fails to reckon with the hard reality that God does not grade on a curve. If you fail to score 100% on the exam, you fail. The righteousness of God required is perfect righteousness which does not fail at any point of God's demands. It is the righteousness which is fulfilled only in the life of Christ "with whom [God] is well-pleased." The fallacy of the Jews, and that of the vast majority of people living today, is that self-righteousness is thought sufficient to satisfy God—He will expect no more of me than what I can give. People are seeking a righteousness of self-improvement relative to the self-improvement of others with whom they are in competition for a place in heaven. They fail to understand that they are not being measured by the righteousness of others, but God's perfect righteousness.

In contrast to this is the righteousness of God imputed to the sinner by grace through faith in Jesus Christ. It is God-righteousness which recognizes one's own self-righteousness as **filthy rags** (Isa. 64: 6) or as **rubbish** (Phil. 3: 8) to be carried out with the day's garbage and burned. The Apostle Paul considered his self-righteousness as something he had to lose **in order that [he] may gain Christ, and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of [his] own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith...** (Phil. 3: 8b-9).

This transition from the self-righteousness of human merit to the God-righteousness of faith is so radical that it cannot occur apart from the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit (Titus 3: 5).

b. The Necessity of Repentance

God often requires of man what he is not capable of producing on his own without supernatural help. Jesus says, "**Be ye perfect, as your Father in heaven is perfect.**" Augustine prayed, "Lord, give what you command, and command what you will." God does not grade on a curve, and He accepts nothing less than perfect righteousness. He gives this perfect righteousness through faith in Jesus Christ, and the repentance which leads to perfect righteousness is a repentance man cannot produce, being dead in trespasses and sins and blinded by his own conceit. God, therefore, gives man the repentance he needs; and man, in turn, is required to repent (Acts 2: 38; Mk. 1: 15). It is a gift from God which man is obligated to return.

After the conversion of Cornelius' household, Peter was confronted by the leaders in Jerusalem for going to the house of a Gentile and eating a meal with them. He then related to them how they had responded to the gospel and received the gift of the Holy Spirit.

"Therefore if God **gave to them the same gift** as *He gave* to us also after believing in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could stand in God's way?"¹⁸ When they heard this, they quieted down and glorified God, saying, "Well then, **God has granted to the Gentiles also the repentance that leads to life.**" (Acts 11:17-18 NASB)

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

Modern evangelism often fails to reckon with the reality of God's requirements in the face of man's inability. In response to this belief, we often reduce the requirements of salvation to an achievable level—a gospel of good news which avoids the necessity of repentance. Some theologians have correctly reacted to the requirement of a certain level of emotional sorrow which may or may not be the result of Biblical repentance.

There is no reason why sorrow should not accompany repentance or lead on to repentance, but the sorrow, whatever it may be, is not repentance. In 2 Cor. 7: 10, it is said that "godly sorrow worketh repentance," that is, it leads on to repentance; but the sorrow is not to be mistaken for the change of mind which it may serve to produce...The New Testament call to repentance is not an urge to self-condemnation, but is a call to a change of mind which promotes a change in the course being pursued...and it is safe to say that few errors have caused so much hindrance to the salvation of the lost than the practice of demanding of them an anguish of soul before faith in Christ can be exercised. Since such emotions cannot be produced at will, the way of salvation has thus been made impossible for all who do not experience the required anguish...Salvation is made to be conditioned on feelings and not on faith. Likewise, people are led by this error to measure the validity of their salvation by the intensity of anguish which preceded or accompanied it (Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, Vol. 3, pp. 372-373, emphasis mine).

We may legitimately differ with Chafer on certain points, but his criticism is well-taken. There is indeed a sorrow of the world which produces death (2 Cor. 7: 10) which has nothing to do with Biblical repentance. Judas regretted his decision to betray Christ, but it was not a repentance leading to faith.

Then when Judas, who had betrayed Him, saw that He had been condemned, he felt remorse and returned the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders, (Matt. 27:3 NASB)

Sinners suffering from the consequences of their sins are sorry, but they are not sorry for having offended God. Further, people have different personalities and will express godly sorrow in different ways which cannot be infallibly measured by anyone but God. Chafer makes it clear that true change of mind is necessary unto salvation, but this repentance is not to be measured by the liter in tears. Likewise, Murray says,

Again, we must make full allowance for the diversity of individual temperament and psychology. In some people the intellectual aspect may be more preponderant [significant], in others feeling, in others will. And that feature is not annulled in the operations of grace. Hence in some the outstanding feature of their experience in the act of faith is the apprehension and discernment of the truth of the gospel. Perhaps the struggle that preceded faith had to a large extent an intellectual complexion, and the change focused itself in their consciousness in the new light in the understanding. Another person may be more emotionally constituted and the new emotional experience may loom very high in his consciousness. What may be most in prominence is the attraction of the glory and beauty of the

redeemer and falling in love with him. Another is more volitionally constituted, and perhaps what stands out most prominently in his experience is the critical decision. But making full allowance for the profuse diversity of human temperament and psychology and the variety of experience that arises from this diversity, what we must recognize in deference to the biblical teaching is that the whole person is active in faith, and that the specific character of faith as an act of self-commitment to Christ as Saviour demands that all these ingredients coalesce [come together]. They coalesce to make faith the proper exercise of intelligent, confident, loving trust (*Collected Writings of John Murray*, Vol. 2, pp. 260-261).

The necessity of true repentance, however, is inescapably evident in the Scriptures, and as we shall see in our discussion of faith, the emotional element is present. As we have seen earlier, the gospel of repentance is the only gospel which is authorized by the resurrected Lord before His ascension into heaven.

“Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and rise again from the dead the third day; and that **repentance for forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in His name** to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem” (Lk. 24: 46-47).

If man is in rebellion against God, and if the gospel is the proclamation of the terms of peace, it is inconceivable that God would not require of him the change of mind necessary to lay his weapons down and submit to His Lordship. Jesus came to put an end to man’s rebellion, not to sanction it with God’s peace.

2. Faith

Faith could have been treated before repentance. Repentance and faith are inseparable and may be considered as two sides of the same coin—you can’t have one without the other. Nevertheless, they are distinct from one another in that repentance is looking back to the futile past, and faith is looking forward to a promising future. Before we define what faith is, let us be clear about what it is not. (See Krabbendam, *Christian Doctrine*, pp. 133-134, from which much of this summary has been taken.)

a. What Faith Is Not

First, faith is not “fides implicita”, implicit faith in what the Church believes. When many professing believers are confronted with the question, “Why do you believe what you believe”, they reply, “Because it’s what I’ve been taught by my church.” But it is not enough simply to blindly believe what your church believes without personal conviction of its truthfulness. This is Roman Catholicism, but it is not the faith of the Bible. The reformers were careful to discredit the concept of the church as the intermediary of salvation standing between the individual and Christ. To be saved, the individual must believe in Christ, not in what his church says about Christ.

Secondly, it is not merely knowledge of the truth. There are many who give intellectual assent to the propositions of the virgin birth, the deity of Christ, His crucifixion, resurrection, etc. Knowledge is necessary, but knowledge alone is not faith. There are many literary scholars who have studied the Bible from beginning to end and have understood its contents intellectually better than true believers, but they have not yielded themselves to its message.

Thirdly, faith is not knowledge plus assent to its truthfulness. This also is necessary but does not in itself constitute Biblical faith. If it did, the devil himself would be a Christian, since he and his subordinate demons believe that God is one and that Jesus is the Son of God.

You believe that God is one. You do well; the demons also believe, and shudder. (Jas. 2:19 NASB)

When He came to the other side into the country of the Gadarenes, two men who were **demon-possessed** met Him as they were coming out of the tombs. *They were* so extremely violent that no one could pass by that way.²⁹ And they cried out, saying, "What business do we have with each other, **Son of God**? Have You come here to torment us before the time?" (Matt. 8:28-29 NASB)

In the synagogue there was a man possessed by the spirit of an unclean demon, and he cried out with a loud voice,³⁴ "Let us alone! What business do we have with each other, Jesus of Nazareth? Have You come to destroy us? I know who You are-- the Holy One of God!" (Lk. 4:33-34 NASB)

Fourthly, faith is not the ground or merit upon which our salvation rests. We are not saved by a faith in faith, but by faith in Jesus Christ. There is nothing meritorious in faith which is a gift from God. It is merely the empty vessel with which we reach out to receive the gift of salvation.

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

b. What Faith Is

Faith is knowledge and assent, but more than that, it is trust.

(1) First, faith consists of knowledge, for how can we trust someone we don't know?

"We must know who Christ is, what he has done, and what he is able to do" (Murray, *Redemption Accomplished and Applied*, p. 110). Faith is not a blind leap in the dark hoping that something is true without any evidence of it being true. This would be presumption and not faith, and much of the weakness of our evangelism consists in our pleas to believe in Christ when we have provided too little information to believe. Lack of knowledge is also at the heart of the weakness of faith in many believers who have heard only a bare minimum of the Biblical message. These believers are vulnerable to the false teaching and preaching of anyone who can skillfully hold the attention of his audience, and the world does not lack for such men who have powerful form but no substance. Paul acknowledges this intellectual component of faith which must be communicated clearly and accurately.

How then will they call on Him in whom they have not believed? How will they believe in Him **whom they have not heard**? And how will they hear without a preacher? (Rom. 10:14 NASB)

So **faith comes from hearing**, and hearing **by the word of Christ**. (Rom. 10:17 NASB)

I am amazed that you are so quickly deserting Him who called you by the grace of Christ, **for a different gospel**;⁷ which is *really not another*; only there are some who are disturbing you and want to distort the gospel of Christ.⁸ But even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to what we have preached to you, he is to be accursed!⁹ As we have said before, so I say again now,

if any man is preaching to you a gospel contrary to what you received, he is to be accursed! (Gal. 1:6-9 NASB)

Thus, Paul considered the intellectual content of the gospel so important that any substantial alteration of its message rendered the message a false gospel and its messenger accursed (mentioned twice for emphasis).

The writer of Hebrews is insistent that knowledge is essential to faith.

And without faith it is impossible to please *Him*, for he who comes to God **must** believe that **He is and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him.** (Heb. 11:6 NASB)

In his classic work, *What is Faith?*, J. Gresham Machen, staunch defender of historic Christianity during the liberal onslaught of the 1920's and 30's, makes the following observation of this text:

In the first place, religion is here made to depend absolutely upon doctrine; the one who comes to God must not only believe in a person, but he must also believe *that* something is true; faith is here declared to involve acceptance of a proposition. There could be no plainer insistence upon the doctrinal or intellectual basis of faith. It is impossible, according to the Epistle to the Hebrews, to have faith in a person without accepting with the mind the facts about the person...

Confidence in a person is more than intellectual assent to a series of propositions about the person, but it always involves those propositions, and becomes impossible the moment they are denied...Assent to certain propositions is not the whole of faith, but it is an absolutely necessary element in faith. So assent to certain propositions about God is not all of faith in God, but it is necessary to faith in God; and Christian faith, in particular, though it is more than assent to a creed, is absolutely impossible without assent to a creed. One cannot trust a God whom one holds with the mind to be either non-existent or untrustworthy (pp. 47-48, emphasis mine).

Machen continues by insisting that faith is not only dependent upon the doctrine of God's existence, but other doctrines as well, the doctrines of the personality of God and creation found in the later part of v. 6 and v. 3 of Hebrews 11. God not only exists, but He acts in behalf of those who come to Him and "seek" Him in faith (v. 6b). He is also the God who creates the world out of nothing by the power of His word (v. 3). These doctrines are to be received by faith.

Certain things, according to the Bible, are known about God, and without these things there can be no faith (pp. 50-51).

(2) Second, faith consists of conviction or assent to its truthfulness.

Again, there must be more than this, but faith must consist of at least this. Berkhof includes assent as the emotional element of faith whereby the believer has a deep conviction of the truthfulness of the gospel and "feels that it meets an important need in his life" (*Systematic Theology*, p. 504). Murray includes two aspects of assent, the *intellectual* element and the *emotional* element.

It is truth believed as applicable to ourselves, as supremely vital and important for us. Saving faith cannot be in exercise unless there is a recognition of correspondence between our needs and the provision of the gospel. Knowledge passes into conviction" (*Collected Writings of John Murray*, Vol. 2, p. 258).

The truth is no longer a logical abstraction, as in a mathematical equation, but something which grips the heart of the sinner bringing him to the point of decision to embrace the truth as his own.

(a) The Intellectual Element of Faith

There is a sense in which the truth of the gospel, administered to the individual by the Spirit, is so compelling that he must believe it. This is not to say he is externally forced into belief, but that he is internally compelled by the overwhelming evidence of Scripture. To the unaided mind, the Scriptures are incomprehensible, not due to any internal incoherency but because the natural mind cannot perceive their truthfulness and is at enmity (war) with the God who inspired them.

But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised. (1 Cor. 2:14 NASB)

For the mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace,⁷ because the mind set on the flesh is **hostile toward God**; for it does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able *to do so*, (Rom. 8:6-7 NASB)

With reference to God, there is no neutrality. For this reason, one cannot examine the evidence of God impartially without imposing his personal bias upon the evidence. But aided by the Spirit through regenerating grace, a person reading the Bible or listening to the preaching of the Word of God will be compelled to admit that the Bible accurately describes the hopelessness of the human condition and the necessity of God's plan of salvation.

The reformed view is in direct contrast to liberalism which elevates the importance of the feelings and the will of the person in making a decision to believe. Certainly, both the will and feelings are involved in believing; but ultimately it is the mind compelled by the evidence which makes a decision to believe in Christ. The will and the feelings will then respond to the intellectual convictions of the mind. Liberal theologians would have us believe that a person simply wills to believe something against the evidence, and if his belief makes him feel better this is sufficient to confirm the truthfulness of his faith "for him." Someone else may believe something contradictory, but if this contradictory faith "works for him" by improving his life, it is just as authentic and truthful as the other person's faith. Under such a system, one can believe anything he wants, and any belief is confirmed as true on the basis of the *subjective* experience of the person. One can be a Christian, Muslim, Buddhist, Hindu, etc. or a combination of all religions, and there are no objective facts outside the person which can refute the fallacy of his faith. But this is faith in faith, and there is no need for objective verification of the truth outside the person.

In contrast, the faith of Christianity is based on compelling historical facts external to the person, facts which are objective and independent of the person and not subjectively dependent upon the person. The Christian faith would be true whether anyone believed it or not simply because it has its objective basis in God, in the Word of God, and in verifiable, historical events reported in the Word of God. It is the objective truth of the gospel which compels our belief and which compelled the disciples to proclaim it and die for it. It is self-evident that if the resurrection of Christ had been proven to be a hoax, Christianity would not have spread all over the world in 2000 years. This is because Christianity is not simply a moral system like Islam or Buddhism. It revolves around a person, the person of Christ, who not only gave us a moral system, but died, rose again, and sent His Spirit to implement a new life in mystical communion with his person.

"In that day you will know that I am in My Father, and **you in Me, and I in you.** (Jn. 14:20 NASB)

"Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, so neither *can* you unless you abide in Me. (Jn. 15:4 NASB)

"I do not ask on behalf of these alone, but for those also who believe in Me through their word;²¹ that they may all be one; even as You, Father, *are* in Me and I in You, that they also may be in Us, so that the world may believe that You sent Me. (Jn. 17:20-21 NASB)

"I have been crucified with Christ; and it is **no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me;** and the *life* which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me. (Gal. 2:20 NASB)

Therefore if you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God.² Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth.³ For **you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God.**⁴ When Christ, **who is our life,** is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory.⁵ Therefore consider the members of your earthly body as dead to immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed, which amounts to idolatry. (Col. 3:1-5 NASB)

In his letter to the Corinthians, the Apostle Paul argued that the objective reality of the resurrection of Jesus Christ is essential to our faith without which there is no faith worth believing: **If the dead are not raised, Let Us Eat and Drink, For Tomorrow We Die** (1 Cor. 15: 32b).

For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised;¹⁷ and if Christ has not been raised, your faith is worthless; you are still in your sins.¹⁸ Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished.¹⁹ If we have hoped in Christ in this life only, we are of all men most to be pitied. (1 Cor. 15:16-19 NASB)

This is the kind of faith mentioned in Hebrews 11,

Now faith is the assurance of *things* hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. (Heb. 11:1 NASB)

The Greek word for **assurance** is *hupostasis* which some translations have rendered **substance** (KJV and NKJ). Based on this translation, the idea would be that faith lays hold of the promise as something “real and solid”, something with substance, even though it has not yet been seen. Another possibility is “confident assurance” or “confidence” (NIV; Young’s Literal Translation) which is how the same word is used in Heb. 3: 14 (cf. Philip E. Hughes, *Hebrews*, p. 439).

Hughes presents another possibility, one which is also favored by James Montgomery Boice in his *Foundations of the Christian Faith* (p.410). Faith is the “guarantee” or “attestation” of things hoped for. It is a term used of documents which provide proof of ownership. The verse could be translated, **Faith is the title-deed of things hoped for**, a translation preferred by Moulton and Milligan. The idea presented in this translation is that faith is the guarantee of all the promises of God in Christ in such a way that they are conceived as already in our rightful possession. When a person purchases a house in the US, he is given title to the property at the time of closing (when the money crosses the table from buyer to seller). The title or deed is proof of his ownership and is the guarantee of his personal enjoyment of the property even if he does not live in the property for another six months.

You and I do not have present possession of all that God has in store for us in Christ. We are still living in this world and subjected to pain, sorrow and sin, but this passage, as well as other passages in the NT, presents these promises as so certain *that for all practical purposes*, we have them already. We own the deed to them, and that deed is our faith, by which we take possession of everything God is for us in Christ even though yet unseen. We also know, by faith, that the events of the virgin birth, the death and resurrection of Christ, etc. are accurately reported to us in the Bible, even though we were not there to see them. The same idea is presented in Eph. 1: 14 in which the Holy Spirit is given to us as **a pledge of our inheritance, with a view to the redemption of God's own possession**. The pledge is forward-looking to the final inheritance of the saints and is a security deposit guaranteeing that inheritance. The Holy Spirit is producing a conviction of sin and a filial spirit which cries out, **Abba, Father** (Rom. 8: 15), rock-solid evidence that our faith is not the product of wishful thinking but based on evidence.

(b) The Emotional Element of Faith

It should be evident that faith includes the emotional assent, as well as the intellectual assent, to the truth confronting us in the Bible. This is simply because we have a desperate need for this truth, and we see it as supremely applicable to us (Gal. 2: 20). There can be no detached intellectual assent to the facts without these facts moving us emotionally toward the Savior in one degree or another (see Murray's comments above). There are many truths that do not affect us in this way. We know that Lake Victoria is the second largest freshwater lake in the world, but this fact does not strike us as something which affects us personally, and we would not be driven to tears talking about it. But when we come to grips with the hopelessness of our human situation and God's grace manifest in Christ, we cannot help but react to it with our whole being.

Certainly we cannot miss the emotional context of the examples of faith given to us in Hebrews 11—Noah building the ark in the midst of derisive skeptics, Abraham raising a knife to sacrifice his son and receiving him back again when God provided the ram, Moses' mother hiding him in a basket and committing him into God's care, Moses choosing to suffer with the Israelites instead of staking his claim to the riches of Egypt. All these examples of faith are suggestive of intense psychological and emotional responses which indicate the heart-felt convictions of those who believed in God with all their hearts. Martyrs will not die for the mere propositional statement that "Jesus is Lord"; they will die because the Lord Jesus has taken complete possession of them—mind, will, and emotions which constitute the whole heart or essence of the person.

Other illustrations of whole-hearted assent abound in Scripture. The sinful woman (probably a former prostitute; Luke 7: 36-50) who knelt at Jesus' feet and washed Jesus' feet with her tears testified that He was the answer to her deepest needs and the desperateness of her sin-torn life. She surely did not know as much OT theology as the Pharisee with whom Jesus was dining that day, but the little she knew gripped her heart and caused her to reach out to Jesus in the most self-effacing way possible. Like the publican in the parable of Luke 18, she went down to her house justified while Simon remained unforgiven in his self-righteousness. Paul tells us to **rejoice always** (1 Thess. 5: 16), not because our circumstances are favorable, but because of the salvation we have in Christ. Rejoicing includes the emotional as well as the intellectual element. We are happy, not because we have hypnotized ourselves, because we believe in a living Savior who loves us. Our joy is based on substance.

(3) Third, faith consists of trust.

Some theologians, Hodge included, consider trust to be the primary idea of faith (Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, Vol. 3, pp. 42-43). As I said earlier, knowledge of the truth and assent to the truth are not enough. (Even though it could be argued that the assent described above contains the element of trust.) The demons know the truth about Jesus, and they assent to its truthfulness, but they do not believe in Jesus—that is, they do not entrust themselves to His forgiveness and care. When we trust in Christ, trust in ourselves is abandoned; and we cast ourselves upon Him as the only solution to our need.

A good illustration of this trust is found in the thief on the cross (Luke 23: 39-44). At first, he was as guilty as the other thief in hurling abuses at Christ (Matt. 27: 44), but something changed as he closely observed the unfolding events of the crucifixion. He concluded that Jesus was no lunatic with delusions of grandeur, but was, indeed, the Son of God He claimed to be. And though Jesus was not deserving of death, the thief knew he was getting what he deserved. In the sixth hour, three hours before Jesus' death, the thief cried out for Him to remember him when he came into His kingdom. Assuredly this man was not trusting in the good deeds of his past, for he had none to offer. But he was just as assuredly not trusting in any good deeds of the future, for he had no future in this life. Whatever was going to save him must come from outside himself. At that point, he was totally, unreservedly, entrusting his fate to the good graces of Jesus of Nazareth being put to death beside him. It is very likely that Luke includes this story as the proper pattern or paradigm for anyone coming to faith in Christ. Genuine faith does not look backward to what we have done. Our lives before Christ, as well as the thief's, are devoid of anything worthy of merit. Likewise, we do not look forward at what we can do in the future to please God and earn our salvation. His only hope, and ours, was in the present in the person of Christ in whom he put his whole hope and trust. None of us can come to Christ in any other way.

It was a child-like faith based upon very little knowledge of the truth. His conversion—proven by Jesus' response to him—shows us that faith the size of a mustard seed can apprehend Christ. Clearly, it is not the amount of knowledge that makes the difference, even though some knowledge is essential, as we have seen. The crucial difference is in whether our knowledge, even deficient knowledge, causes us to forsake our own merits and efforts and to entrust ourselves totally to Christ for forgiveness and safe keeping.

This was the child-like faith Jesus was speaking of when he took a young child (*paidion*) and set him before the disciples saying, **Truly, I say to you, unless you are converted and become like children, you shall not inherit the kingdom of heaven** (Matt. 18: 3). He did this after being asked by the disciples, **Who then is greatest in the kingdom of heaven?** The disciples were still operating on a system of merit, merit by which they could earn recognition in heaven, merit they could rest upon to receive the kingdom. Their self-trust was ill-founded because the faith which makes one great in the kingdom of heaven is a trust which looks away from self to Christ. The bigger He looks to us, the smaller we look to ourselves.

We should be careful here not to pit knowledge against trust as if the more knowledge we have of Christ, the less will be our trust. It is just the opposite. The more knowledge we have of Christ and our own helpless human condition, the more we will be inclined to look away from ourselves to Christ. As Machen says, "The more we know of God, the more unreservedly we trust Him; the

greater [will] be our progress in theology, the simpler and more childlike will be our faith” (Machen, *What is Faith*, p.96).

...the question may well be asked whether the faith of a child, after all, is independent of knowledge. We for our part think that it is not, provided the child has come to the age of conscious personal life. The child possesses, stored up in its memory, experiences of the mother’s goodness, knows how to distinguish her from other persons, and hence smiles at her approach...A child never trusts a person whom it holds with its mind to be untrustworthy (Machen, p. 94).

c. Assurance of Faith

How can a person know for sure that he has come to faith in Christ? There are many passages of Scripture which offer assurance of the fact that our faith is genuine.

Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ,² through whom also we have obtained our introduction by faith into this grace in which we stand; and we exult in hope of the glory of God.³ And not only this, but we also exult in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance;⁴ and perseverance, proven character; and proven character, hope;⁵ and hope does not disappoint, **because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us.** (Rom. 5:1-5 NASB)

It is natural for the Christian to have the overwhelming sense of the love of God in his heart. The love mentioned in this verse is not our love for God, but God’s love for us which is mediated to us through the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit constantly reminds us of God’s love for us based on what He has done for us in Christ. But the awareness of God’s love in this verse is not a logical deduction based upon reasoning, but rather an emotional awareness of the love of God which we can feel.

For you have not received a spirit [*pneuma*] of slavery leading to fear again, but you have received a spirit [*pneuma*] of adoption as sons by which we cry out, "Abba! Father!"¹⁶ The Spirit [*to pneuma*] Himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God, (Rom. 8:15-16 NASB)

The Holy Spirit is contrasted with the spirit of slavery in v. 15 and is the Spirit (the Holy Spirit) of adoption, the Spirit who testifies to the fact that we are the children of God. It is by the Holy Spirit that we receive the confidence to cry out, “**Abba, Father,**” an expression indicating a close filial relationship with God. This verse is closely linked to Gal. 4: 6, the reason many expositors (John Murray included) interpret **spirit** in Rom. 8: 16 not as a human disposition but as the Holy Spirit.

Because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit [*to pneuma*] of His Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!" (Gal. 4:6 NASB)

The definite article, **the**, is missing before the first two occurrences of **spirit** in Rom. 8: 15 is present in Gal. 4: 6 (see my commentary on this text).

For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers,³⁹ nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Rom. 8:38-39 NASB)

Paul was convinced that Christians could not be separated from the love of God in Christ Jesus. Death could not do it. The circumstances of life could not do it. Angelic beings (demons) and evil

powers (principalities) could not do it. No created thing (including the devil himself) could separate the Christian from God's love (see my commentary on this text). The text does not prove that a person's faith is genuine, but it assures us that if our faith is genuine, it cannot be taken from us.

We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love abides in death. (1 Jn. 3:14 NASB)

One's love for other Christians is a good indicator of true faith. John also tells us that this love comes to expression in deeds, not just empty words. The sacrifice of Christ for us is the paradigm of our sacrificial love for the brethren.

We know love by this, that **He laid down His life for us**; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.¹⁷ But whoever has the world's goods, and sees his brother in need and closes his heart against him, how does the love of God abide in him?¹⁸ Little children, **let us not love with word or with tongue, but in deed and truth.** (1 Jn. 3:16-18 NASB)

Everyone who practices sin also practices lawlessness; and sin is lawlessness.⁵ You know that He appeared in order to take away sins; and in Him there is no sin.⁶ No one who abides in Him sins; no one who sins has seen Him or knows Him.⁷ Little children, make sure no one deceives you; the one who practices righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous;⁸ the one who practices sin is of the devil; for the devil has sinned from the beginning. The Son of God appeared for this purpose, to destroy the works of the devil.⁹ No one who is born of God practices sin, because His seed abides in him; and he cannot sin, because he is born of God.¹⁰ By this the children of God and the children of the devil are obvious: anyone who does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor the one who does not love his brother. (1 Jn. 3:4-10 NASB)

This passage gives us assurance on the basis of a changed life. If a person no longer **practices sin as a way or pattern of life**, he can be assured that the Holy Spirit is doing a work of grace in his heart. The underlined verbs are present tense, indicating ongoing, habitual activity. The unbeliever habitually sins while the believer habitually practices righteousness. As I mentioned earlier, John is not contradicting himself. He knows that believers still sin (1 Jn. 1: 8-10), but they do not live in sin. Once again, part of the practice of righteousness includes love for others, especially believers. The absence of love casts doubt upon the genuineness of faith.

These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life. (1 Jn. 5:13 NASB)

The whole epistle of 1 John was written for the purpose of giving assurance of faith to believers. If one could never be sure of his salvation, John would never have written the letter. One must read the whole epistle to understand what **these things** are. John wishes to assure his readers that if they are walking in the light (1:7), confessing their sins (1: 9), loving the Father rather than the world (2: 15), believing the truth (2: 22-23), practicing righteousness (2: 29; 3: 7), and loving the brethren with practical deeds of kindness (3: 10-18), they will know that they are of the truth and will be able to assure their hearts that their faith is genuine (3: 19).

Search me, O God, and know my heart; Try me and know my anxious thoughts;²⁴ And see if there be any hurtful way in me, And lead me in the everlasting way. (Ps. 139:23-24 NASB)

Genuine faith does not shy away from self-examination and the desire to be corrected. The hypocrite, on the other hand, is satisfied to look good in the eyes of others only (See G. I. Williamson, *The Westminster Confession of Faith for Study Classes*, p. 132).

Assurance of faith may be cultivated by attending diligently to the means of grace. The believer must make sure that he is diligent in attending the preaching of the Word, diligent in prayer and in fellowship with other believers, and diligent in the private reading of the Scriptures. Moreover, regular participation in the Lord's Supper is a means of grace prescribed by the Lord as a tangible reminder of his union with Christ.

And when He had taken *some* bread *and* given thanks, He broke it and gave it to them, saying, "This is My body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of Me." (Lk. 22:19 NASB)

For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus in the night in which He was betrayed took bread;²⁴ and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, "This is My body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of Me."²⁵ In the same way *He took* the cup also after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood; do this, as often as you drink *it*, in remembrance of Me."²⁶ For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes. (1 Cor. 11:23-26 NASB)

The Holy Spirit does not operate in a vacuum. He makes use of the means mentioned above to assure the believer that he is a true Christian. When Christians get "sloppy" in their faith and fail to make use of the means of grace, they should not be surprised if they fall into sin or if their love for the Lord gets cold and lifeless. Like a muscle that gets weak from disuse, our faith gets weak if it is not exercised daily. God will allow the true Christian to see warning signs that he is not exercising due diligence in his faith. He may get depressed, or he may not have the desire to pray or read the Scriptures. He also may become careless in his behavior, doing things which he would not ordinarily do and entertaining evil thoughts. He knows in his heart that something is not right with the Lord. These warning signs are brought to his attention by the Holy Spirit to awaken him from his spiritual slumbers. The hypocrite, on the other hand, will continue lagging behind in diligence—becoming irregular in church attendance, reading the Bible, etc., until the faith which he once demonstrated is finally extinguished altogether. As John says, "They went out from us, but they were not really of us; for if they had been of us, they would have remained with us; but they went out, in order that it might be shown that they all are not of us" (1 Jn. 2: 19).

Scripture makes it clear that there are many who believe they are saved but are lost (Matt. 7: 21-23). Do all true Christians have assurance of their faith? Reformed theologians acknowledge the fact that one can be a genuine believer and lack such assurance. The possible reason for this lack may be lack of diligence in the means of grace, a serious lapse into sin (Ps. 51), or even a melancholy personality which is more disposed to look on the negative side of life. By reading 1 Jn. 5: 13, we may deduce that John was writing his letter to convince many believers that assurance of salvation was possible, implying that for many of his readers this assurance was lacking. The same reasoning may be applied to Romans 8: 31-39, in which Paul assures his readers that nothing can separate them from God's love simply because God is the one who **justifies** them. Moreover, both Christ and the Spirit intercede for them (Rom. 8: 26, 34).

D. Justification

1. Definition of Justification

Berkhof defines justification as “a judicial act of God, in which He declares, on the basis of the righteousness of Jesus Christ, that all the claims of the law are satisfied with respect to the sinner” (*Systematic Theology*, p. 513). The sinfulness of man was a problem which God had to overcome in order to save him. How can sinful man be just before God, and how can God declare the sinner to be just or righteous in His sight while being just and holy?

Justification is a legal concept and is analogous to the decision of a judge in a court of law. As the offender stands before the judge, the judge makes a legal pronouncement concerning the person’s state of guilt or his status in relation to the law. If he is innocent, this means that with respect to the law he has satisfied all the demands of the law. If he is guilty, those demands have not been satisfied, and he will suffer the penalty which the law requires. It is a foregone conclusion that the sinner standing before a holy God is guilty and not innocent. The question remains as to how God can declare Him innocent—how God can justify the guilty sinner?

Justification, strictly defined, does not mean to “make righteous” in the subjective sense but to “declare righteous” in the objective sense. That is, justification has no relation to the character of the person being justified. When the judge makes his pronouncement upon the person’s guilt or innocence, there is no pretense that the judge is actually producing a change in the person’s character. He is merely declaring a state of innocence or guilt which already exists. In this sense, justification should not be confused with sanctification, the internal reformation of the individual. Justification does not refer to the development of moral character inside the person. Berkhof (pp. 513-514) notes four differences between justification and sanctification. (1) Justification removes the guilt of sin while sanctification removes the pollution of sin. (2) Justification takes place in the tribunal (courtroom) of God on the outside while sanctification takes place inside the person. Justification does not change the inner life while sanctification does. (3) Justification is a once and for all act of God which is never repeated. It is not a process. “Man is either fully justified, or he is not justified at all.” Sanctification is a process which continues throughout life and is never completed while we live. (4) In the economy of salvation, the Father justifies while the Spirit sanctifies.

Several texts will demonstrate the declarative nature of justification (See John Murray, *Redemption Accomplished and Applied*, p.120, and James Montgomery Boice, *Foundations of the Christian Faith*, pp. 418-419).

He who justifies the wicked and he who condemns the righteous, Both of them alike are an abomination to the LORD. (Prov. 17:15 NASB)

It is an abomination to the Lord to justify the wicked. If the term **justify** meant “to make righteous”, then the verse would mean that it was an abomination to make the wicked into a righteous person—hardly the meaning of the verse. Instead, it is an abomination to declare the wicked to be righteous when he is not.

"I say to you, among those born of women there is no one greater than John; yet he who is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he." ²⁹ When all the people and the tax collectors heard *this*, they acknowledged God's justice, having been baptized with the baptism of John. (Lk. 7:28-29 NASB)

The tax-gatherers and the people **justified God** (KJV, NKJ). Obviously, they did not make God upright or righteous, something God already was without any approval from man. It simply means they declared God to be just or **acknowledged God's justice** (NASB) or **declared God just** (ESV).

But wishing to justify himself, he said to Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" (Lk. 10:29 NASB)

The lawyer attempted to **justify** his neglect of others by asking Jesus to define the word, **neighbor**. The lawyer was not attempting to make himself internally righteous; he was simply declaring himself to be free of guilt with respect to the law commanding us to love our neighbor as ourselves.

And He said to them, "You are those who justify yourselves in the sight of men, but God knows your hearts; for that which is highly esteemed among men is detestable in the sight of God. (Lk. 16:15 NASB)

The same can be said of this verse. The Pharisees were not attempting to improve their moral character by justifying themselves. They simply wished to declare themselves to be righteous in the opinions of others.

Who will bring a charge against God's elect? God is the one who justifies; ³⁴ who is the one who condemns? Christ Jesus is He who died, yes, rather who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us. (Rom. 8:33-34 NASB)

The context of this text is clearly a courtroom scene in which charges of guilt are brought against the elect. In opposition to those charges, God is the one who justifies or declares us to be not guilty.

We can see from these texts that justification is the "recognition and declaration of the status that belongs to [the] person in virtue of his character or conduct or both" and "not the forming of the character or the framing of the conduct" (*Collected Writings of John Murray*, Vol. 2, p. 205). Therefore, justification is a legal or forensic declaration of innocence in relation to the law. The state of innocence in relation to the law is not produced in the act of justification but exists before justification takes place. In other words, the person declared to be just is already just before the declaration of innocence. Murray admits that this fact can cause some confusion (*Collected Writings*, p. 206). The status of sinners before the judgment seat of God can only be one thing—the status of guilty. Therefore, if justification is only a declaration of the sinner's innocence which he already has before the declaration of innocence, how can this declaration of innocence be true? It would appear that God's declaration of innocence is really a sham (a false claim). We have already learned from Proverbs 17: 15 that it is an abomination to the Lord to justify the guilty; yet, this is precisely what God appears to be doing in justification.

At this point we are faced with the uniqueness of soteric (pertaining to salvation) justification. Romans 4: 5 teaches us that God "justifies the ungodly", so how does God do this without falling under the same condemnation of those who "justify the wicked" (Prov. 17: 15)? We know that all the judgments of God are true and just, so it remains for us to discover how God can be still be true while declaring the sinner to be innocent. According to Murray,

The question is: what is antecedent [i.e. what exists before the declaration of innocence] which guarantees that the declaration is a declaration according to truth?" (Collected Writings, p. 206).

How can we prevent the accusation that God is telling a lie about the sinner, declaring him to be innocent, when he appears to be guilty? Murray maintains that despite all the Biblical data indicating that justification is merely a legal declaration of innocence without implying the formation of the person's character, "the mere notion of declaring to be righteous is seen to be inadequate of itself to express the fullness of what is involved in God's justification of the ungodly" (*Redemption Accomplished and Applied*, p. 122.). The English translation, **declare to be righteous**, does not adequately convey all that is included in the act of soteric justification (from the Greek word, *dikaióō*). The reason for this inadequacy of language is that the situation between a human judge and the accused criminal does not adequately convey the extreme predicament in which the sinner finds himself before the Judge of all the earth. In such a case, God had to establish a special provision to meet the extremity and hopelessness of the situation in order that His declaration of innocence would be a declaration according to truth (*Redemption*, p. 123). How does God do this? What special provision does He make in the justifying act which is unique to soteric justification?

It is simply this: that justification includes within itself another action of God in which He constitutes or establishes the innocence which He declares to be true.

This action is one in which he *actually causes to be the relation* [of innocence] *which in justification is declared to be*. He effects a right relation as well as declares that relation to be. In other words, he *constitutes* that state which is declared to be. Hence the justifying act either includes or presupposes [assumes beforehand] the constitutive act. This alone will make the declaration to be a declaration according to truth (Collected Writings, p.207, emphasis his).

In summary, God not only declares the sinner to be innocent of all guilt and, therefore, righteous; but He actually establishes the fact of his innocence and righteousness in the act of justification. In this way, God is not untruthful nor is He unjust in declaring the sinner as guiltless and righteous in His sight; He is declaring something that is actually true of the sinner. The justified sinner is, in actual fact, innocent and righteous with respect to the law of God. The declaration is not pretense but is grounded upon a new relationship established by God's grace between Himself and the sinner. Appeal can be made directly to Scripture to provide proof for this conclusion (See *Redemption Accomplished and Applied*, pp. 123-124; *Collected Writings*, 107-108).

For as through the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, even so through the obedience of the One **the many will be made righteous**. (Rom. 5:19 NASB)

The word translated "**made**" in the NASB and the NKJ may be translated **constituted**. Just as the sin of Adam constituted or established everyone as sinners, through the obedience of Christ many (not all) will be established as righteous, or **made righteous**, in the sight of God. The change taking place is not the internal change of character which takes place in sanctification. It is rather the change in status in the person's relationship to God and to His law. In the sin of Adam, the status of the whole human race was altered from innocence (righteousness) to the state of guilt (unrighteousness). In Christ, the status of many was changed from guilt to innocence (righteousness).

For if by the transgression of the one, death reigned through the one, much more those who **receive** the abundance of grace and of **the gift of righteousness** will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ. (Rom. 5:17 NASB)

In this verse we discover the method by which believers are constituted or made righteous. We are made righteous by receiving the gift of righteousness transferred to us by grace. And how is this gift received? In other passages (to be discussed later) we learn that the gift of righteousness is received by faith. Faith is the empty cup which is held out by the sinner to receive the gift of the righteousness of Christ. Christ's righteousness is imputed to us through the instrument of faith.

For what does the Scripture say? "ABRAHAM BELIEVED GOD, AND IT WAS CREDITED [*logizomai*] TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS."⁴ Now to the one who works, his wage is not credited as a favor, but as what is due.⁵ But to the one who does not work, but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is credited as righteousness, (Rom. 4:3-5 NASB)

Therefore IT WAS ALSO CREDITED [*logizomai*] TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS.²³ Now not for his sake only was it written that it was credited to him,²⁴ but for our sake also, to whom it will be credited, as those who believe in Him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead, (Rom. 4:22-24 NASB)

Even so Abraham BELIEVED GOD, AND IT WAS RECKONED [*logizomai*] TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS. (Gal. 3:6 NASB)

namely, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not **counting** [*logizomai*] their trespasses against them, and He has committed to us the word of reconciliation. (2 Cor. 5:19 NASB)

Through faith, righteousness is **credited** [*logizomai*] to our account. In the eyes of God, we are **considered** (or, **reckoned**) to be righteous because the righteousness of Christ imputed to us. The word **reckoned** is the same word used in 1 Cor. 13: 5 in which Paul says that love **does not take into account** [*logizomai*] **a wrong suffered**. The idea is that love does not keep a record of wrongdoings for the purpose of using that record against the offender. The word is used again in a negative way in 2 Cor. 5: 19 where Paul says that our sins are not **counted** against us; that is, there is no record of our sins standing in the way of our reconciliation with God. This is the same idea presented in Ps. 103: 12, **As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us**. Paul uses the word in the same way in Romans and Galatians, except that it is used positively instead of negatively. Our faith (rather than our transgressions) is written down on the record books as if it were righteousness. This does not mean that our faith (or Abraham's) is a righteous act meriting salvation. It means that our faith is **considered** or recorded in terms of righteousness simply because our faith is rooted in Christ who *is* righteous. His righteous deeds of obedience and sacrifice become ours by way of imputation even as our sins are recorded to His account by way of imputation. This is the precise teaching of 2 Cor. 5: 21 in which the apostle states that through union with Christ, He is made sin on our behalf.

He made Him 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 NASB)

The additional action that God takes in justification is the imputation of the righteousness of Christ to our account. This is the constitutive act whereby God makes the sinner righteous before He declares him to be so. When He declares us to be righteous, it is a declaration according to truth because Christ's righteousness is being credited to our account during the declaration of

justification. The establishment of righteousness (the constitutive act) is involved in the act of justification itself. One of the strongest arguments in favor of this theory is that the re-creation in Christ is analogous to the creation of the physical world when God called into being something which did not exist previously. After calling the creation into being, He then declared it to be good. Therefore, God does not merely recognize in the sinner the existence of righteousness, but actually calls this righteousness into existence in the act of justification and then declares it to be so. (See also Murray, *Collected Writings*, p.208).

2. The Instrument of Justification—Faith

Although justification is the work of God, the faith of the believer is the instrument by which justification takes place. No one will ever be justified without personal faith in Jesus Christ. As I mentioned before when discussing the *ordo salutis*, faith comes before justification. We do not believe because we are justified; we are justified because we believe. This priority of faith before justification is best demonstrated from Galatians 2: 16 in which Paul says that **“we have believed in Christ Jesus, that we may be justified by faith in Christ...”** He does not say that “we have been justified in Christ that we may believe in Christ.” Belief clearly is instrumental to justification; justification is not instrumental to belief. However, we have also learned that regeneration is prior to faith. We believe because we have been regenerated; therefore, regeneration by the Spirit is instrumental to belief.

Because faith is the instrument of justification, then justification is by grace and not by works.

For if those who are of the Law are heirs, faith is made void and the promise is nullified; (Rom. 4:14 NASB)

For this reason *it is* by faith, **in order that it may be in accordance with grace**, so that the promise will be guaranteed to all the descendants, not only to those who are of the Law, but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all, (Rom. 4:16 NASB)

Justification **by works of the law** and justification **by faith** are exact opposites. Justification by works or by law is according to personal merit and is the just payment (wages) for one’s self-righteousness.

Now to the one who works, his wage is not credited as a favor, but as what is due. (Rom. 4:4 NASB)

No one can be justified on this basis because personal righteousness is always inadequate and imperfect.

nevertheless knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the Law but through faith in Christ Jesus, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, so that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the Law; since by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified. (Gal. 2:16 NASB)

But justification by faith is based on the righteousness of another, Jesus Christ, and is not wages for our personal righteousness. It is the **gift** of Christ’s righteousness which we receive by believing in **His** work, not ours.

But if it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works, otherwise **grace is no longer grace.** (Rom. 11:6 NASB)

For the wages of sin is death, but the **free gift** of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Rom. 6:23 NASB)

Justification by works and justification by grace are mutually exclusive (Rom. 11: 6), for the minute we begin to add our merit to the merit of Christ, we defile the merit of Christ. It is like adding one drop of cow manure to a glass of pure water. The water is now defiled and undrinkable because of this one drop of manure. The merit of Christ is perfect, undefiled, and acceptable to God because everything He did, including His death, was done according to the proper standards of the Law, accompanied by pure motives (love for God and others) and accomplished for the proper purpose or goal, the glory and kingdom of God. Our works are impure, insufficient, and therefore, unacceptable. To present our work to God along with the perfect righteousness of Christ as the basis of our justification is analogous to presenting a king with a glass of water defiled with cow manure. Being justified by faith alone, we do not need to offer anything to God for salvation but our faith in Jesus. However, this affirmation of the sufficiency of faith in Christ for justification does not eliminate the necessity of good works as a confirmation of genuine faith, our next topic.

3. The Confirmation of Justification—Good Works

If we are justified by faith alone, what need is there for good works on our part? Are they necessary at all? This is the question posed by Paul in Romans 6: 1 following his explanation of justification by faith. **What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin, that grace may increase?** In other words, the presence of sin in our lives and the forgiveness of those sins demonstrate the grace of God. Therefore, the more we sin, the more God forgives, and the more gracious He is proven to be. Therefore, let us continue in sin so the magnitude of God's grace will shine more brilliantly.

But this theory distorts the end to which justification is directed. We are justified in order to be sanctified, and justification is a necessary step before the process of sanctification begins. We are declared righteous (and made righteous) as the means of enabling us to live a holy life. Even our election before the world began was election for the purpose of holiness.

just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, **that we would be holy and blameless before Him...**(Eph. 1:4a NASB)

We are saved from our sin, not in it. Any teaching which minimizes good works or sanctification in the redemptive process distorts the doctrine of justification by faith. As Luther noted, "We are not saved by faith *and* works, but by a faith *that* works." **Faith without works is useless** (James 2: 20).

Salvation is by grace, but it is also the teaching of Scripture that judgment will be according to **works**.

"For the Son of Man is going to come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and WILL THEN REPAY EVERY MAN ACCORDING TO HIS DEEDS. (Matt. 16:27 NASB)

And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and **books** were opened; and **another book** was opened, which is *the book* of life; and the dead were judged from the things which were written in the books, **according to their deeds**.¹³ And the sea gave up the dead which were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead which were in them; and they were judged, every one *of them according to their deeds*. (Rev. 20:12-13 NASB)

Therefore we also have as our ambition, whether at home or absent, to be pleasing to Him. ¹⁰ **For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ**, so that each one may be recompensed for his **deeds** in the body, **according to what he has done**, whether good or bad. ¹¹ Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade men, but we are made manifest to God; and I hope that we are made manifest also in your consciences. (2 Cor. 5:9-11 NASB)

Obey your leaders and submit *to them*, for they keep watch over your souls **as those who will give an account**. Let them do this with joy and not with grief, for this would be unprofitable for you. (Heb. 13:17 NASB)

Now he who plants and he who waters are one; but each will receive his own reward according to his own labor. ⁹ For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, God's building. ¹⁰ According to the grace of God which was given to me, like a wise master builder I laid a foundation, and another is building on it. But each man must be careful how he builds on it. ¹¹ For no man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. ¹² Now if any man builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, ¹³ each man's work will become evident; for the day will show it because it is *to be* revealed with fire, and the fire itself will test the quality of each man's work. ¹⁴ **If any man's work which he has built on it remains, he will receive a reward.** ¹⁵ **If any man's work is burned up, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire.** (1 Cor. 3:8-15 NASB)

These texts do not contradict justification by faith alone but recognize that true faith is never alone and will always be demonstrated objectively in good works. It cannot be otherwise. Furthermore, the future rewards which believers receive in heaven will be based upon the work they have done for the Lord on earth.

"Blessed are you when *people* insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me. ¹² "Rejoice and be glad, **for your reward in heaven is great** [*i.e., the reward for enduring persecution; D.M.*]; for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you. (Matt. 5:11-12 NASB)

"Do not **store up** for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. ²⁰ "But **store up** for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in or steal; ²¹ for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. (Matt. 6:19-21 NASB)

Slaves, be obedient to those who are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in the sincerity of your heart, as to Christ; ⁶ not by way of eyeservice, as men-pleasers, but as slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart. ⁷ With good will render service, as to the Lord, and not to men, ⁸ **knowing that whatever good thing each one does, this he will receive back from the Lord, whether slave or free.** (Eph. 6:5-8 NASB)

Now he who plants and he who waters are one; but each will receive **his own reward according to his own labor**. (1 Cor. 3:8 NASB)

These texts speak of extra rewards given on the basis of individual works (cf. Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, Vol. 4, p. 715). They are grounded upon the grace given to every believer since apart from grace no good works would be possible. However, the rewards for each believer are also different since the **measure of faith** to appropriate this grace is different for every believer.

"I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, **for apart from Me you can do nothing.** (Jn. 15:5 NASB)

For through the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think more highly of himself than he ought to think; but to think so as to have sound judgment, **as God has allotted to each a measure of faith.** (Rom. 12:3 NASB)

The measure of the reward is based upon the measure of one's faith registered in his works. All believers will be rewarded differently **according to his own labor** and he will **receive back from the Lord** in proportion to **whatever good thing [he] does. Store up for yourselves treasures in heaven** is antithetical to **storing up wrath for yourself** in Rom. 2: 5.

But because of your stubbornness and unrepentant heart you are **storing up wrath for yourself** in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God, ⁶ **who WILL RENDER TO EACH PERSON ACCORDING TO HIS DEEDS:** (Rom. 2:5-6 NASB)

As the unbeliever continues sinning, the evil deeds for which he will be punished in hell continue to add up, and his punishment will be proportionate to those deeds. There is no equality of punishment in hell, just as there is no equality of reward in heaven. The believer **stores up treasures** in heaven through good deeds. Contrary to the unbeliever, he is not constantly attempting to acquire more treasures **on earth** which may be stolen or damaged. He is putting those treasures where they will last, **in heaven**, and they will be proportionate to his deeds. We cannot **store up more** eternal life. We cannot add more years to "eternal" life, but we can add rewards (treasures) to it.

"Sell your possessions and give to charity; make yourselves money belts which do not wear out, an unfailing **treasure** in heaven, where no thief comes near nor moth destroys. (Lk. 12:33 NASB)

Casual reflection upon this truth will reveal its wisdom. Even common wisdom would conclude that a serial murderer will receive a different punishment in hell than a petty thief, and the Apostle Paul will receive a much greater reward than possibly any other Christian. Some Christians are timid and hesitant in their labor for the Lord, and perhaps a bit lazy. Christian martyrs will receive a greater reward than those who chose to play it safe and never took any risks for their faith.

4. The Disposition of Justification—Prayer for Forgiveness

Justification is a once and for all, irrevocable (irreversible) act of God. Once declared righteous, the sinner will never be declared unrighteous. The question may then be asked why it is necessary for us to ask for daily forgiveness if we are forgiven of all past, present, and future sins (1 Jn. 1: 8-9). The simple answer to this question is to cite the Lord's Prayer in which we are told to ask, **"Forgive us of our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us."** This alone is sufficient for us to know; however, we may go further by saying that although the erring sinner is forgiven, his sin puts him at odds with a Holy Father who hates sin. When a child sins against his natural father, he does not cease to be loved by his father; yet to be restored to fellowship, he must repent and apologize. How can it be otherwise with God? Yet we must go further by saying that persistent confession and repentance is the natural disposition of the child of God who is indwelt by the Holy Spirit who came to convict the world of sin (Jn. 16: 8). When he is convicted of sin, the normal thing for him to do is confess his sin. Lack of persistent confession of sin is evidence that one has not been justified.

5. The Importance of Justification by Faith

Reformed theologians still agree that the doctrine of justification by faith is the pivotal doctrine of evangelical Christianity. This claim has come under attack recently even in evangelical circles, but it would be difficult to dislodge justification by faith alone as the supreme test of Biblical orthodoxy. Since Martin Luther rediscovered this doctrine in the early part of the 16th century, the history of the Church and the world has changed dramatically for the better.

When the article of justification has fallen, everything has fallen...This is the chief article from which all other doctrines have flowed...the master and prince, the lord, the ruler, and the judge over all kinds of doctrines (cited by James Montgomery Boice, *Foundations of the Christian Faith*, p. 416, from *What Luther Says: An Anthology*, vol. 2).

John Calvin, the second leading reformer of that century, said that it was “the main hinge on which religion turns” (Boice, p. 416, quoting from Calvin’s *Institutes*).

These statements are not hyperbole [exaggerations for effect]. They are simple truth because justification by faith is God’s answer to the most basic of all religious questions: How can a man or woman become right with God?” (Boice, *Foundations of the Christian Faith*, p. 416).

Murray concurs.

It may be safe to say that the greatest event for Christendom in the last 1500 years was the Protestant Reformation. What was the spark that lit the flame of evangelical passion? It was, by the grace of God, the discovery on the part of Luther, stricken with a sense of his estrangement from God and feeling in his inmost soul the stings of his wrath and the remorse of a terrified conscience, of the true and only way whereby a man can be just with God. To him the truth of justification by free grace through faith lifted him from the depths of the forebodings of hell to the ecstasy of peace with God and the hope of glory. If there is one thing the Church needs today it is the republication with faith and passion of the presuppositions of the doctrine of justification and the reapplication of this, the article of a standing or falling Church (*Collected Writings*, vol. 2, p. 203).

[Excursus: The Relationship between Judgment According to Works and the Justification of Infants Dying in Infancy and the Mentally Incompetent]

In Rev. 20 (see quotation above), the **great white throne** of judgment is the judgment for all men, believers and unbelievers. This is made clear by the reference to the **books** and **another book... the book of life**. The **books** are records of everyone’s **deeds**, both good and bad (2 Cor. 5: 10; Matt. 16: 27. Judgment according to works may also be proven from Matt. 25, Prov. 24, and Ps. 62.

"Then the King will say to those on His right, 'Come, you who are blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. ³⁵ 'For I was hungry, and you gave Me *something* to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave Me *something* to drink; I was a stranger, and you invited Me in; ³⁶ naked, and you clothed Me; I was sick, and you visited Me; I was in prison, and you came to Me.' (Matt. 25:34-36 NASB)

"Then He will also say to those on His left, 'Depart from Me, accursed ones, into the eternal fire which has been prepared for the devil and his angels; ⁴² for I was hungry, and you gave Me *nothing* to eat; I

was thirsty, and you gave Me nothing to drink;⁴³ I was a stranger, and you did not invite Me in; naked, and you did not clothe Me; sick, and in prison, and you did not visit Me.' (Matt. 25:41-43 NASB)

Deliver those who are being taken away to death, And those who are staggering to slaughter, Oh hold them back. 12 If you say, "See, we did not know this," Does He not consider it who weighs the hearts? And does He not know it who keeps your soul? **And will He not render to man according to his work?** (Prov. 24:11-12 NASB)

And lovingkindness is Yours, O Lord, For **You recompense a man according to his work.** (Ps. 62:12 NASB)

The OT references to **the books** and **the book** are found in Daniel.

"A river of fire was flowing And coming out from before Him; Thousands upon thousands were attending Him, And myriads upon myriads were standing before Him; The court sat, And **the books** were opened. (Daniel 7:10 NASB)

"Now at that time Michael, the great prince who stands *guard* over the sons of your people, will arise. And there will be a time of distress such as never occurred since there was a nation until that time; and at that time your people, **everyone who is found written in the book**, will be rescued.² "Many of those who sleep in the dust of the ground will awake, **these to everlasting life, but the others to disgrace and everlasting contempt.** (Daniel 12:1-2 NASB)

It is clear from Matthew 16, 25, and many other passages that the criterion of judgment is a person's **deeds**. In Matt. 25, believers have proven genuine faith by their deeds of commission while unbelievers have been judged for their sins of omission—things they failed to do. While a person's profession of faith may be empty, his deeds generally reveal the true state of his heart. Paul warns the wayward Corinthian believers that **we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ**. Believers are not exempt from the judgment **according to their deeds**. Writing to the church in Rome, Paul says,

Or do you think lightly of the riches of His kindness and tolerance and patience, not knowing that the kindness of God leads you to repentance?⁵ But because of your stubbornness and unrepentant heart you are storing up wrath for yourself in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God,⁶ who WILL RENDER TO EACH PERSON ACCORDING TO HIS DEEDS:⁷ to those who by perseverance in doing good seek for glory and honor and immortality, eternal life;⁸ but to those who are selfishly ambitious and **do not obey the truth**, but obey unrighteousness, wrath and indignation.⁹ *There will be* tribulation and distress for every soul of man **who does evil**, of the Jew first and also of the Greek,¹⁰ but glory and honor and peace to everyone **who does good**, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.¹¹ For there is no partiality with God. (Rom. 2:4-11 NASB)

The **book of life** is the book which contains the names of all who are chosen in Christ and whose names have also been written in this book before the foundation of the world (Eph. 1: 4; Rev. 13: 8; 17: 8). Our deeds are not sufficient unto salvation, but the fact that our names are written in the book of life more than compensates for our deficiency in deeds. We will be rewarded for good deeds (Rev. 22: 12; Eph. 6: 7-8), but what the punishment will be for our **bad** deeds is more difficult to determine (cf. 1 Cor. 3: 14-15; 2 Cor. 5: 10); scripture does not say. Possibly, we will be faced with the shame of our evil deeds of commission and omission (Osborne, *Revelation*, p.

722). demonstrating our utter unworthiness of salvation, and then pardoned on the basis of our faith in Christ. In this present life, we do not fully realize just how sinful we are or just how much God has forgiven us. The apostle Paul admitted,

For I am conscious of nothing against myself, **yet I am not by this acquitted**; but the one who examines me is the Lord. (1 Cor. 4:4 NASB)

On the Day of Judgment, however, all our secret sins (Rom. 2: 16) will be revealed to our consciousness, resulting in our praise and thanksgiving to God for His pardon. We don't have much information about the judgment of believers, but our accountability for bad deeds (sins of commission and sins of omission) may take the form of the disappointment we will experience if God gives us a glimpse of unfulfilled accomplishments had we exercised more faith and obedience. Or, it may include the forfeiture of rewards we could have received but will not receive. Nevertheless, we are saved not because our deeds are exemplary, but because of Christ's exemplary deeds of active obedience during life and His exemplary deed of passive obedience in suffering torture before and during His crucifixion and His voluntary death. Moreover, this judgment of believers will be like the blink of an eye compared to the glory that shall be revealed to us (Rom. 8: 18-25).

God's judgment will not be founded on the professions, or the relations of men, or on the appearance or reputation which they sustain among their fellows: but on their real character and on their acts, however secret and covered from the sight of men those acts may have been. God will not be mocked and cannot be deceived; the character of every man will be clearly revealed. (1.) In the sight of God. (2.) In the sight of man himself. All self-deception will be banished. Every man will see himself as he appears in the sight of God. His memory will probably prove an indelible register of all his sinful acts and thoughts and feelings. His conscience will be so enlightened as to recognize the justice of the sentence which the righteous judge shall pronounce upon hm. All whom Christ condemns will be self-condemned. (3.) There will be such a revelation of the character of every man to all around him, or to all who know him, as shall render the justice of the sentence of condemnation or acquittal apparent (Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, Vol. 3, p. 849, emphasis mine).

It is point "(2.)... His memory will probably prove an indelible register of all his sinful acts and thoughts and feelings. His conscience will be so enlightened as to recognize the justice of the sentence which the righteous judge shall pronounce upon him" that provides part of the foundation for my belief that all infants dying in infancy (not exclusively infants of believing parents) and the mentally incompetent are elect, and therefore go to heaven. By mentally incompetent, I mean those who are so mentally impaired that they cannot understand intelligible speech, conversation, or argument. This would include even a simple presentation of the gospel or a simple explanation of the God of creation (cf. my notes on Romans 1).

What memory or guilt of sinful acts, thoughts, and feelings would infants or the mentally incompetent experience in hell? None. R. A. Webb is correct when he says,

Penal suffering, to be strictly penalty, must be recognized as such in the consciousness of the sufferer, else it would be to him unmeaning and causeless pain. The element of awareness is an essential ingredient in rational punishment.

An infant, being a sentient creature, is capable of suffering; but being an unconscious creature, with faculties too immature to understand and appreciate the reason for suffering, it is incapable of

being punished, strictly and truly speaking. Its only guilt is Adamic and federal; guilt, therefore, of which it is not aware, and of which it can become conscious only by growing to the years of maturity, and expressing its sinfulness in its own voluntary and conscious acts of transgression.

If it were sent to hell on no other account than that of original sin, there would be good reason to the divine mind for the judgment, but the child's mind would be a perfect blank as to the reason of its suffering. Under such circumstances, it would know suffering, but it would have no understanding of the reason for its suffering. It could not tell its neighbor—it could not tell itself—why it was so awfully smitten; and consequently the whole meaning and significance of its sufferings, being to it a conscious enigma [mystery], the very essence of penalty would be absent, and justice would be disappointed of its vindication.

Such an infant could feel that it was in hell, but it could not explain, to its own conscience, why it was there. If another should inform the child of the crime for which it was suffering the pangs of hell, it might believe on testimony and accept the truth by faith in the informer, but it would still be destitute of any fact on its consciousness or conscience, of any deed in its own history, upon which it could rest an experimental conviction of its ill-desert and damnation. It would be experimentally, blankly ignorant.

For suffering to be truly penal there are two necessary conditions: (1) there must be a reason satisfying the conscience of him [in this case, God] who inflicts it, and (2) there must be a reason certifying guilt to the conscience of him [the infant] who experiences the suffering.

Adamic guilt—original sin—is a reason which satisfies the divine conscience, because he perceives it; and because of it, he passes a sentence of condemnation, and therefore judges the unborn posterity of Adam to be damnable. That is a righteous condemnation; but Adamic sin, not being in the consciousness of the infant, the *execution* of the divine judgment prior to the child's maturity, would leave the child's mind unacquainted with the reason for its assignation [appointment] to hell-torments, and without the power to appreciate the cause therefor; and then the divine being would know, that the child does not know, why it has been so terribly afflicted, and that it suffers in conscious ignorance of its offence; and that would leave his [God's] justice unsatisfied, and defeat the very purpose of the divine being in sending any person to hell.

Let it be understood that God does not send any human being to woe just for the sake of suffering, but in order to inflict *penalty*, and vindicate law and justice...

To execute the death-penalty upon the unconscious infant [or the mentally incompetent, D.M.] would be, for God to defeat the only motive he has for sending any human being to an endless hell. Hence the child which, on account its federal guilt is punishable *de jure* [by right or legal establishment], is not, as such punishable *de facto* [in actual fact]. The sentence of condemnation for original sin was just; but the *execution* of that sentence, expediency demands, shall be delayed until the child, through actual sinning can be made aware...

...Providence must delay the death of the reprobate infant until he comes to maturity, and translates his original sin into conscious actual sin, so there may be a basis, not simply in law and truth, but in consciousness and conscience and experience for penalty.

Consequently a reprobate infant cannot die in infancy: such a result would defeat the ends of justice. Consequently and conversely, all infants dying in infancy are elect, redeemed, regenerated and glorified (R.A. Webb, *The Theology of Infant Salvation*, pp. 288-291, italicized emphasis his, underlined emphasis and words in brackets mine).

In another place, Webb rejects the position that infants of Christian parents are saved because they were “brought” for baptism (cf. Matt. 19: 13-15)—associating this position with the errors sacramentarianism and baptismal regeneration (Webb, (pp. 39-40). Throughout the Bible, men are always judged on the basis of their deeds (see citations above). The pollution of Adamic sin is the

evidence and reason that men are born sinners and liable to damnation, but not the evidence and reason committing them to actual judgment.

Jesus blesses the little children in Matthew 19: 13-15; Mark 10: 13-16; and Luke 18: 15-17. These three texts are some of the most vigorously debated from scholars on both sides of the issue of infant baptism. According to one view, Jesus is simply using children as an object lesson to accentuate the necessity of receiving the kingdom of God as children who are helplessly dependent. *Paidia* is used in Matthew and Mark, a term which may include older children as well as infants; *brephe* occurs in Luke 18:15, a term used of **babies** (NASB, Young's Literal Translation, NIV) or **infants** (KJV, NKJV, ESV; cf. 1 Peter 2: 2). In imitation of a baby dependent upon his mother's breasts, the sinner must acknowledge his total dependence upon God's grace to enter the kingdom of God (see my discussion of Matt. 18 in "Synoptic Gospels"). It is significant that Luke places this pericope in the context of the parable of the Pharisee and the publican (Lk. 18: 9-14) in which the self-righteous Pharisee goes away from the temple unforgiven while the penitent publican, recognizing his hopeless inability to justify himself before God, rests completely upon God's mercy (v. 14). Immediately following is the story of the little children who reflect the child-like faith of the publican.

The teaching focus of the story is not, anachronistically (out of time), infant baptism, but the necessary qualifications to enter the kingdom of God—total dependence, humility, and the acknowledgement that we have nothing to offer God in exchange for our salvation. But although baptism is not mentioned, we should not dismiss these texts as being irrelevant to the question of infant baptism. Taking the standard anti-pedobaptism (anti-infant baptism) position, Carson notes,

Jesus does not want the little children prevented from coming to him (v. 14), not because the kingdom of heaven belongs to them, but because the kingdom of heaven belongs to those like them (so also Mark and Luke, stressing childlike faith): Jesus receives them because they are an excellent object lesson in the kind of humility and faith he finds acceptable (Carson, *Matthew*, p. 420).

But does the kingdom of heaven definitely NOT belong to children but only to those who are like them? It is true that all three Synoptists use the words, **to such as these** (*toiouton*) emphasizing not the children themselves but those with the child-like qualities necessary for entering the kingdom. However, are we to assume that Jesus is excluding the children, even infant children (*brephe*), altogether? R. A. Webb argues strongly against this suggestion.

But if this is all that is meant [that only people of child-like quality are eligible for the kingdom] then the Master's indignation [Mk. 10: 14; D.M.] must be thought of as having been aroused by his disciples' proposition to send away, not *members*, but only *types*, of the kingdom of God. Was this all? Was the Redeemer's displeasure excited only by the prospect of there being taken away from him a happy object lesson? If so, then he but leveled his criticism at their gross stupidity and blockheadedness, in not having the perception to recognize a living text in the children, from which to preach a good sermon on Christian humility. That does not seem to my mind to be a sufficient reason for his deep displeasure and stinging rebuke. Nor does this view sufficiently explain the fact that our Lord *laid his hands on the heads of these children and blessed them*. Why? According to this view, he did it not because they were *members* of the kingdom of God, but because they were apt illustrations of the members of his kingdom—mere *emblems* of what the members of his kingdom should be (R. A. Webb, *The Theology of Infant Salvation*, p. 34, emphasis his, words in brackets mine).

Total exclusion of infants from Jesus' consideration is quite literally to throw out the baby with the bath water. Jesus blessed the children brought to him, not as "object lessons" in humility, but as children, the objects of His love and compassion and as true recipients of the kingdom of heaven. Had He viewed them as anything less than human beings in need of grace and salvation, His lesson on this occasion would have been misleading to the parents who were longing for His blessing upon them (so also Chamblin, *Matthew*, vol. 2, p. 941). Having given Jesus a convenient illustration, the parents would have gone away with nothing but a blessing and prayer emptied of any genuine intent on Jesus' part, an unthinkable assumption unworthy of the Savior.

The passage should not be taken as an argument for baptismal regeneration, as if to imply that all infants receiving infant baptism are presumed regenerate (saved). Nor should it be taken to prove that all infants, regardless of their relationship to believing parents, should be baptized. Clearly the passage says nothing directly about the ordinance of baptism. However, the text does strongly imply that infants are not excluded from the saving blessing of Christ because they cannot make a conscious profession of faith. Furthermore, the reason they are eligible for the kingdom has really nothing to do with the sacrament of infant baptism, but the prerogative of Christ alone who wishes to include them. None of the passages mentioned prove conclusively the genuine faith of the parents who brought their children—although their faith is a reasonable assumption. Therefore, this is not a passage which implies infant salvation for covenant children alone. It may be argued that only those children who are either "brought" to Jesus or who "come" to Jesus for blessing are in view, but this would prove too much. It would prove that the ground or reason for their inclusion into the kingdom of heaven is the faith of their parents and not the will and blessing of Christ. Those who are not "brought" by their parents are, therefore, damned. According to this view, the salvation of infants is grounded upon the activity, or inactivity, of their parents (Webb, pp. 39-40).

It should be noticed from Matthew's account that the children were brought to Jesus so that He would **lay His hands on them and pray**, an ancient symbol of blessing (Matt. 19: 13; Carson, p. 420). We are warranted to believe that Jesus grants this request, thus begging the question: What did Jesus pray for on behalf of these children? We may reasonably assume that He prayed for the very thing He declared, that these very children would be received into the kingdom of His heavenly Father, a prayer most certainly answered (Webb, p. 38, citing Calvin). While the passage does not indisputably prove the salvation of all infants dying in infancy, it certainly lends support to the theory (see Webb's entire argument in *The Theology of Infant Salvation*).

By extending the argument, just as infant children may not be refused the blessing of the kingdom of God, the infant children of believers may not be refused baptism on the grounds that they cannot consciously believe the gospel. If Jesus did not refuse to bless these children whose parentage was questionable, who are we to refuse the baptism of believer's children? In the same way the texts lend support to the doctrine of infant salvation, they likewise lend support to the doctrine of infant baptism (cf. Chamblin, *Matthew*, p. 941).

We learned that regeneration is the work of God's grace upon the passive sinner. Justification follows regeneration, repentance, and belief, the last two being the human response to regeneration. In the case of an infant or mentally incompetent person—neither of whom can repent or believe—no one can prove that God does not regenerate such persons either in the womb or at some other point before death apart from repentance and faith (Isa. 49: 1). For that matter, how do we prove that babies and the mentally incompetent do not respond in repentance and faith after

death? The rebirth is accomplished through the activity of the Spirit, who works however and whenever He wishes and upon whomever He wishes (Jn. 3: 8). Luke reports that the unborn John the Baptist leaped in Elizabeth's womb when he heard the sound of Mary's voice. **Filled with the Holy Spirit**, Elizabeth acknowledged that the baby John **leaped in my womb for joy**. Thus, she was not imagining John's joy, but speaking under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Although Isa. 49: 1 and Lk. 1: 41-44 are only two texts, we must admit from these texts that God is not only able, but actually has regenerated babies in the womb. And if He can do so in the womb, He can do so anytime thereafter.

[End of Excursus]

E. Adoption

1. Definition of Adoption

In adoption, the believer is accepted into the family of God and is made an heir to the inheritance which the Father bestows upon 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 (John 1: 12).

This verse implies a legal authority which is given to us by the Father to be called His children. The implication is staggering to the imagination, and we can scarcely understand how great is the inheritance which the Father has given to us. The magnitude of our calling as children prompted Paul to pray that **the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints** (Eph. 1: 18). The doctrine of adoption prompted John to exclaim, **See how great a love the Father has bestowed upon us, that we should be called children of God; and such we are** (1 Jn. 3: 1). One reformed scholar maintains that adoption is the "highest privilege that the gospel offers," (J. I. Packer, *Knowing God*, p.186), and he would not be alone in this assessment.

2. The Pattern of God's Relationship with His New Covenant People

In the Old Covenant, God was known by the name of Yahweh, the name for God which signified His covenant faithfulness to Israel. Even today, Jewish rabbis will not use or write the name Yahweh for fear of profaning the name unintentionally. The new Christian name for God is Father. This is the name Jesus told His disciples to use when they asked Him how to pray. **"Pray, then, in this way: 'Our Father who is in heaven, Hallowed be Your name.'**" (Matt. 6:9 NASB). The name of God must still be revered and respected. As the Father of the New Covenant people, He is no less a consuming fire than He was in the Old Covenant—Hebrews 12: 29 says, that **God is a consuming fire**, not "was a consuming fire". Nevertheless, there are differences between the administration of the Old Covenant and the New Covenant. Lacking any differences, it would not have received the distinction of being new (Lk. 22: 20). (I have discussed some of these distinctions in my "Doctrine of Man." I will only summarize here.

Recall the events in Ex. 19 when the OC law (the covenant documents) was given to the nation of Israel shortly after the exodus from Egypt.

"You shall set bounds for the people all around, saying, 'Beware that you do not go up on the mountain or touch the border of it; **whoever touches the mountain shall surely be put to death.**'¹³ 'No hand shall touch him, **but he shall surely be stoned or shot through**; whether beast or man, he shall not live.' When the ram's horn sounds a long blast, they shall come up to the mountain."¹⁴ So Moses went down from the mountain to the people and consecrated the people, and they washed their garments.¹⁵ He said to the people, "Be ready for the third day; do not go near a woman."¹⁶ So it came about on the third day, when it was morning, that there were **thunder and lightning flashes and a thick cloud upon the mountain and a very loud trumpet sound**, so that all the people who *were* in the camp trembled...²¹ Then the LORD spoke to Moses, "Go down, warn the people, so that they do not break through to the LORD to gaze, **and many of them perish.**"²² "Also let the priests who come near to the LORD consecrate themselves, **or else the LORD will break out against them.**" (Exod. 19:12-16,21-22 NASB)

There was thunder and lightning, Mt. Sinai covered in smoke and shaking violently. The people also shook for fear of this holy God who could not be approached. They were even warned not to come near the mountain for fear of accidentally touching it and incurring the wrath of God (v. 21). If even a dumb animal touched it, God would kill it, implying that mothers needed to hang on tight to their small children who might wander off and go too close. The context of the giving of the covenant in Exodus 19-20 is contrasted with the circumstances of the NC (Heb. 12: 18-24).

For you **have not come**

to *a mountain* that can be touched and to a blazing fire,
and to darkness and gloom and whirlwind,

¹⁹ and to the blast of a trumpet and the sound of words which *sound was such that*
those who heard begged that no further word be spoken to them.

²⁰ For they could not bear the command, "IF EVEN A BEAST TOUCHES THE MOUNTAIN,
IT WILL BE STONED."

²¹ And so terrible was the sight, *that* Moses said, "I AM FULL OF FEAR and trembling."

²² **But you have come** to Mount Zion

and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem,
and to myriads of angels,

²³ to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven,
and to God, the Judge of all,

and to the spirits of *the* righteous made perfect,

²⁴ and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant,

and to the sprinkled blood, which speaks better than *the blood* of Abel.

Notice in v. 18 that Christians **have not come** to the circumstances which prevailed at the giving of the Law at Sinai. Also notice the strong adversative **but** (allà in the Greek) in v. 22—**But you have come...**The Christians addressed in Hebrews are also encouraged to “**draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and may find grace to help in time of need**” (4: 16).

Therefore, brethren, since we have **confidence to enter the holy place by the blood of Jesus,**²⁰ **by a new and living way which He inaugurated for us through the veil, that is, His flesh,**²¹ and since we *have* a **great priest** over the house of God,²² **let us draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience** and our bodies washed with pure water.²³ Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful; (Heb. 10:19-23 NASB)

This confidence is far removed from the warnings in Exodus not to touch the mountain where God was giving the Law upon pain of death.

The whole spirit of Old Testament religion was determined by the thought of God's holiness...Again and again it was stressed that man must keep his place, and his distance, in the presence of a holy God. This emphasis overshadowed everything else" (Packer, *Knowing God*, p. 183).

This explains many of the laws requiring ritual cleansing (Lev. 11: 32; 12: 2-8; 13: 1-6); careful observance of food laws (Ex. 22: 31; Lev. 11); even separation of different kinds of seed and cloth (Lev. 19: 9). Such laws were designed to provide tangible instruction to Israel about holiness, a word whose basic meaning is separateness, that is, holiness which is separate from all forms of evil. God's people are still instructed in the holiness of God, but now the precise form of instruction is not as mechanical and restricted to precise rules and regulations, but more general and adapted to the multiplicity of situations facing Christians living in a very different world from that of the OT theocracy. Instead of a theocracy, Christians are now living within the context of the family of God, a theme which shows up again and again in the Sermon on the Mount and in the epistles. Packer insists that adoption, properly understood, governs our lives as Christians in several ways (*Knowing God*, pp.190-193).

a. Adoption governs our conduct

The conduct emphasized in the Sermon on the Mount is the kind which is encouraged by parents for their children, particularly as they get older. When children are small and immature, they must be given specific rules which govern specific forms of behavior. "Don't talk back to mommy and daddy. Don't cross the street until we tell you. Eat your beans or you don't get any pineapple." They need such rules when they are small because they have not yet learned to apply general principles of conduct to specific situations. This ability will come after many years of observing mom and dad and listening to their instruction. As they grow older, they will be given more freedom to make their own decisions and to make their own applications of Biblical principles. This is as it should be, and any parent will be disappointed if his children do not learn to cope with life's problems and moral decisions independently. It is just part of growing up. Three main principles of conduct emerge in the Sermon on the Mount (cf. *Knowing God*, pp. 191-192).

(1) Imitating the Father

Christians are to love their enemies as imitators of their Father in heaven who makes the sun rise on the evil and the good and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous (Matt. 5: 43-45). We are to be perfect as our heavenly Father is perfect (v. 48), indicating that holiness of life is still necessary, but spelled out in terms resembling the modeling familiar to family life. Children in a family learn more truth from the father's example than from a list of rules. Our Father has given us adequate example of His character, not only from the history of the OT, but from the example of Christ in the gospel, who was the fullness of the Father.

(2) Glorifying the Father

Our good works are specifically for the purpose of glorifying our Father and bringing honor to His name.

"Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven. (Matt. 5:16 NASB)

Godly conduct on the part of children is a credit to fathers and misconduct is a discredit. Children who truly love their father are grieved when their misconduct tarnishes his reputation in the community.

You who boast in the Law, through your breaking the Law, do you dishonor God? ²⁴ For "THE NAME OF GOD IS BLASPHEMED AMONG THE GENTILES BECAUSE OF YOU," just as it is written. (Rom. 2:23-24 NASB)

(3) Pleasing the Father

Children in God's family must be focused on pleasing the Father rather than pleasing men.

"Beware of practicing your righteousness before men to be noticed by them; otherwise you have no reward with your Father who is in heaven. ² "So when you give to the poor, do not sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, so that they may be honored by men. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full. ³ "But when you give to the poor, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, ⁴ so that your giving will be in secret; **and your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you.** ⁵ "When you pray, you are not to be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and on the street corners so that they may be seen by men. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full. ⁶ "But you, when you pray, go into your inner room, close your door and pray to your Father who is in secret, **and your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you.** ⁷ "And when you are praying, do not use meaningless repetition as the Gentiles do, for they suppose that they will be heard for their many words. ⁸ "So do not be like them; for your Father knows what you need before you ask Him. (Matt. 6:1-8 NASB)

Here, Jesus goes beyond the outward performance of deeds characteristic of the Law and highlights the importance of motives. Why are we doing good deeds? Are we building our own reputation with men? If so, our earthly reputation will be the full extent of our reward. But if our motive is to please the Father, our reward awaits us in heaven, for nothing we do to please Him will go unnoticed.

Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your toil is not *in vain* in the Lord. (1 Cor. 15:58 NASB)

Slaves, be obedient to those who are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, **in the sincerity of your heart**, as to Christ; ⁶ **not by way of eyeservice, as men-pleasers, but as slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart.** ⁷ With good will render service, **as to the Lord, and not to men,** ⁸ knowing that whatever good thing each one does, this he will receive back from the Lord, whether slave or free. (Eph. 6:5-8 NASB)

We will discuss the importance of adoption for Christian conduct in more detail under "Sanctification", but it should be noted at this point that progress in sanctification is impossible under the slavish fear of God which is the opposite of the "Spirit of adoption" given to the Christian (Rom. 8: 15). The Spirit is given to us to assure us that we are the children of God, not on the basis or ground of our performance, but because of our status as sons.

Good or bad, sons are still sons, and a good father will not disinherit his sons for their flaws, however serious. This is not a license to sin, and a true son will not use it as such because does not want to displease his father. Rather, the assurance of our status will encourage us to seek the Father's face and be restored to favor whenever we sin (as in the parable of the prodigal son). Lack of assurance of status will leave the Christian always in doubt of the Father's love whenever he falls and will leave him in doubt of whether repentance is truly enough.

b. Adoption governs our prayer life.

We are taught to pray, **“Our Father.”** The word for **father** which Jesus used is the familiar term for father which was characteristically used by small children and can be translated by our English word, “Daddy” or the common African equivalent, “Papa”. There is nothing formal about the word since Jesus was teaching His disciples to approach the Father in prayer, not by formal appointment only according to a predetermined time, but always as small children who behave spontaneously. With the heavenly Father, we need no appointments to enter his presence. It should be our impulse to spontaneously seek his help for all our needs.

Our spontaneity as children can be illustrated with a story about Abraham Lincoln, one of the most memorable presidents of the United States. As president, Lincoln entertained important leaders and dignitaries from all over the world in his office. During these meetings no one was allowed to disturb the president or interrupt the meeting unless it was an urgent necessity—no one, that is, except his small son. One day his son walked boldly into a meeting of world leaders, crawled up into Lincoln's lap and said, “Daddy, would you please tie my shoes?” Lincoln paused the meeting for a minute and tied his son's shoes. This familiarity with his father is the kind of familiarity we should have with God and should be cultivating with God. He who holds the stars in the heavens and rules over the affairs of men is never too busy to “tie our shoes”, to hear every request and plea, however great or small. After all, He is our Daddy.

He is also a Father who already knows what we need before we ask Him (Matt. 6: 32), so we don't have to bend His ear or manipulate Him to do what He would not otherwise do. At the same time, He likes to be asked for what we need, even repeatedly, to show us that we need Him more than anything else we are asking for (Matt. 7: 7-12). And He will always respond, not necessarily to our every want but to every need. He is a good Father who knows that many of the things we ask for are “stones” and “snakes” instead of “bread” and “fish” (7: 9-10). He gives us what we should have asked for rather than what we specifically asked for. The Apostle Paul asked for his thorn in the flesh to be removed. His ultimate desire was to be a productive servant of Jesus Christ, and this is precisely the prayer request that God answered (Packer, p.192). The Lord Jesus said to His Father, **“I knew that You hear Me always”** (Jn. 11: 42). This is true of Christ, and it is also true of His adopted children. There is no such thing as unanswered prayer for the child of God; there is only the problem of interpreting the answers. Whether yes or no, God always gives us what we need.

c. Adoption governs the life of faith

“No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth.”²⁵ “For this reason I say to you, **do not be worried about your life**, as to what you will eat or what you will drink; nor for your body, as to what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing?”²⁶ “Look

at the birds of the air, that they do not sow, nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not worth much more than they?²⁷ "And who of you by being worried can add a *single* hour to his life?²⁸ "And why are you worried about clothing? Observe how the lilies of the field grow; they do not toil nor do they spin,²⁹ yet I say to you that not even Solomon in all his glory clothed himself like one of these.³⁰ "But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is *alive* today and tomorrow is thrown into the furnace, will He not much more *clothe* you? You of little faith!³¹ "Do not worry then, saying, 'What will we eat?' or 'What will we drink?' or 'What will we wear for clothing?'³² "For the Gentiles eagerly seek all these things; for your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things.³³ **"But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you."**³⁴ "So do not worry about tomorrow; for tomorrow will care for itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own. (Matt. 6:24-34 NASB)

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus teaches us not to be anxious about our lives. We are to trust Him for every material need which means that material needs should not dominate our thoughts. Rather, our thought life is to be dominated by the earnest desire to see His kingdom and righteousness manifested in our personal lives and the lives of everyone else throughout the world. This is what we should be seeking for; and if this is our priority, He will supply whatever is necessary for that task. This does not mean that we will no longer have to work or pay school fees for our children's education, etc. but it means that God will make Himself personally responsible for the things we truly need. A good father takes upon himself the responsibility of taking care of his children. It is not their **worry**—although it is their responsibility—to put food on the table, but to do the father's will by obeying his commands. We are commanded to work (Ex. 20: 9), but not to worry.

One of our Father's commands is to make disciples of all nations, teaching them also to obey His commandments just as we keep them (Matt. 28: 19-20). If we whole-heartedly do this, we will lack nothing we need until that day when our work on earth is done.

And my God will supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus. (Phil. 4:19 NASB)

Reminding the Corinthians of their previous promise to share their resources with the famine-stricken church in Jerusalem, Paul says,

Each one *must do* just as he has purposed in his heart, not grudgingly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.⁸ And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that always having all sufficiency in everything, **you may have an abundance for every good deed**;⁹ as it is written, "HE SCATTERED ABROAD, HE GAVE TO THE POOR, HIS RIGHTEOUSNESS ENDURES FOREVER."¹⁰ Now He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food **will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness**;¹¹ you will be enriched in everything for all liberality, which through us is producing thanksgiving to God.¹² For the ministry of this service is not only fully supplying the needs of the saints, but is also overflowing through many thanksgivings to God. (2 Cor. 9:7-12 NASB)

If we truly believe our Father is concerned about our well-being, we will then be empowered to expend ourselves in self-sacrifice to others. On the other hand, lack of trust breeds hoarding and the unwillingness to take risks for the sake of God's kingdom.

If God takes care of birds (Matt. 6: 19), He will also take care of us. This assurance will encourage us when are tempted to wonder whether God is still paying attention to their needs. And no one

is immune to such pressing concerns, even those whose sacrifice essentially make the “good life” of security and prosperity impossible (See Packer, p. 193). Peter once asked, “Behold, we have left everything and followed you; what then will there be for us?” (Matt. 19: 27). Jesus gently assured Peter that his future reward was well-worth his sacrifice (19: 28-30). There is no need for the Christian to imitate the behavior of the unbeliever who grabs for whatever he can get out of this life, believing this life is all there is. The Father has gladly chosen to give us the kingdom (Lk. 12: 32), and this gives us the spiritual and psychological freedom to keep a loose grasp on this world and the material things of this world (**Love not the world** 1 Jn 2: 15), for there is simply nothing here to compare with the glory which will one day be revealed to us (Rom. 8: 18).

3. God the Father of believers only

Liberal theology has promoted the idea of the fatherhood of God for all men irrespective of faith in Jesus Christ. Acts 17: 28-29 lends itself to this idea, but upon further examination, the passage cannot bear the weight of this interpretation.

for in Him we live and move and exist, as even some of your own poets have said, 'For we also are His children.'²⁹ "Being then the children of God, we ought not to think that the Divine Nature is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by the art and thought of man. (Acts 17:28-29 NASB)

It is true that all of mankind is the offspring of God as His creation. Believer and unbeliever alike are created in the image of God and bear the stamp of His likeness. However, being in the image of God is not the same as being in right relationship to God as His son. Adoption has reference to this relationship in which we are no longer aliens, but children who have rightful claim to His love and protection. This cannot be said of those who are alienated from God and are **children of wrath**.

And you were dead in your trespasses and sins,² in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience.³ Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest. (Eph. 2:1-3 NASB)

In Matt. 5: 45-48, although God is shown to be good to all men, He is called the Father only of believers. Notice the words **your Father** in v. 45. In Ephesians 3: 15, the family has reference not to all men, but to the family of God. The same can be said of Eph. 4: 6 for which the context is the body of Christ.

For this reason I bow my knees before the Father,¹⁵ from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name, (Eph. 3:14-15 NASB)

There is one body and one Spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling;⁵ one Lord, one faith, one baptism,⁶ **one God and Father of all** who is over all and through all and in all. (Eph. 4:4-6 NASB)

Malachi 2: 10 makes a reference to the fatherhood of God on the basis of creation, but further examination of this text shows the covenantal context of this statement.

"Do we not all have one father? Has not one God created us? Why do we deal treacherously each against his **brother** so as to profane the **covenant of our fathers**? (Mal. 2:10 NASB)

In His controversy with the Pharisees, Jesus denied the existence of the fatherhood of God for all men without exception (Jn. 8: 39-44).

"I speak the things which I have seen with *My* Father; therefore you also do the things which you heard from *your* father." ³⁹ They answered and said to Him, "Abraham is our father." Jesus said to them, "**If you are Abraham's children, do the deeds of Abraham.**" ⁴⁰ "But as it is, you are seeking to kill Me, a man who has told you the truth, which I heard from God; this Abraham did not do. ⁴¹ "**You are doing the deeds of your father.**" They said to Him, "We were not born of fornication; we have one Father: God." ⁴² Jesus said to them, "**If God were your Father, you would love Me**, for I proceeded forth and have come from God, for I have not even come on My own initiative, but He sent Me. ⁴³ "Why do you not understand what I am saying? *It is* because you cannot hear My word. ⁴⁴ "**You are of your father the devil**, and you want to do the desires of **your father**. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth because there is no truth in him. Whenever he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own *nature*, for he is a liar and the father of lies. (Jn. 8:38-44 NASB)

The Pharisees were imitating the deeds of their father, the devil, by opposing Jesus on every occasion and seeking to kill Him. If God had been their father, they would love Jesus because He is the only begotten Son of the Father. By their deeds they proved their true affiliation with the father of lies, the devil. One cannot have satan as his father and God as his father at one and the same time.

4. The fatherhood of God in the Old Testament

There are clear statements in Scripture which establish the fact of Israel's adoption (Ex. 4: 22-23; Dt. 14: 1-2; 32: 5-6; Is. 1: 2; 43: 6; 63: 16; Hosea 11: 1; Mal. 1: 6; 2: 10; and most specifically, Rom. 9: 4. Citations from Murray, *Collected Writings*, Vol. 2, pp. 225).

"Then you shall say to Pharaoh, 'Thus says the LORD, "**Israel is My son, My firstborn.**" ²³ "So I said to you, 'Let My son go that he may serve Me'; but you have refused to let him go. Behold, I will kill your son, your firstborn.'" (Exod. 4:22-23 NASB)

"They have acted corruptly toward Him, *They are* not His children, because of their defect; *But are* a perverse and crooked generation. ⁶ "Do you thus repay the LORD, O foolish and unwise people? **Is not He your Father who has bought you?** He has made you and established you. (Deut. 32:5-6 NASB)

"A son honors *his* father, and a servant his master. **Then if I am a father, where is My honor?** And if I am a master, where is My respect?' says the LORD of hosts to you, O priests who despise My name. But you say, 'How have we despised Your name?' (Mal. 1:6 NASB)

For I could wish that I myself were accursed, *separated* from Christ for the sake of my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh, ⁴ who 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, (Rom. 9:3-4 NASB)

It is true that God was the Father of Israel, yet not all of the Israelites were saved. How can we take comfort in our adoption if most of the Israelites were judged for their unbelief (1 Cor. 10: 1-5; Heb. 3: 12-4: 1-3)? If God will cast off His adopted people in the OT, it would seem logical that He could do the same in the NT.

This is not a simple issue. We must establish a fundamental difference between the adoption of Israel as a nation and the adoption of individuals after their justification. Rom. 5: 1 says, **Therefore having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.** This peace with God is the fruit of adoption in which we have received the Spirit of adoption by which we cry out, **“Abba, Father.”** Adoption comes after justification which is a once and for all act whereby God declares us not guilty and righteous in His sight. Justification is not reversible which means God can never declare someone righteous at some point but then declare him to be unrighteous later due to personal failure. If this were true, then justification is not by faith in Christ, but by works, something we have labored to prove is a false gospel. Justification is by faith alone in Christ alone. Adoption is also a once and for all act of God and irreversible. God does not declare us to be his sons and then declare us not to be his sons.

But the fact remains that Israel was rejected by God for their unbelief and cut from the olive tree of God’s salvation (Rom. 11: 15, 20). Romans 11 also warns the Gentiles that the same thing will happen to them if they do not continue in belief. They should not boast in being grafted in unnatural branches into the olive tree while the natural branches (Israel) were cut off (vv. 20-22). They too will be cut off for unbelief, the same warning we find in 1 Cor. 11 which warns the Corinthians not to imitate the unbelief of Israel.

It would appear from the above texts that our adoption in the NC is equally as tentative (provisional or uncertain) as the adoption of Israel in the OC. But this is not the case as we shall see. Murray makes a distinction between the “theocratic fatherhood” of God in the OC and the “adoptive fatherhood” of God in the NC.

This must be distinguished from [theocratic fatherhood], not because it is principally different but because it is the full-fledged sonship in distinction from the nonage [immature] sonship in the Old Testament period. The distinction is clearly drawn by Paul in Galatians 3: 23-4: 6. The difference is in line with the difference in general between the Old Testament and the New; the Old is preparatory [preparing for something else], the New is consummatory [at the point of completion]. The Old is prepaedutic [preparatory teaching], the New is graduatary [that which pertains to a graduation ceremony]. The children of God in the Old Testament were as children under age. The grace of the New Testament appears in this that by redemption accomplished and by faith in him all without exception are introduced into the full blessing of sonship without the necessity of undergoing a period of tutelary preparation [preparation by a tutor] corresponding to the tutelary discipline of the Old Testament period. That is to say, New Testament believers from among the Gentiles do not have to undergo in the realm of their individual development a preliminary period which corresponds to the Old Testament period in the broad sphere of progressive revelation and realization. There is not recapitulation [doing something over again] in the individual sphere of what obtained in the realm of dispensational progression (*Collected Writings*, vol. 2, p.225-226).

Believers in the NC do not go back under the preparatory period of the OC. By virtue of the finished work of Christ, in which the promises of the OC are completed, NC believers are ushered into a new sphere or age of revelation in Christ. We are no longer under the administration (teaching or tutelage) of the Law, an administration limited to the Israelites before the coming of Christ. We are under a new administration or tutelage which Paul describes in Galatians 5 and 2 Cor. 3 as the tutelage of the Holy Spirit.

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,²³ gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.²⁴ Now those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.²⁵ If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit.²⁶ Let us not become boastful, challenging one another, envying one another. (Gal. 5:22-26 NASB)

Not that we are adequate in ourselves to consider anything as *coming* from ourselves, but our adequacy is from God,⁶ who also made us adequate *as* servants of a **new covenant**, not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.⁷ But if the ministry of death, in letters engraved on stones, came with glory, so that the sons of Israel could not look intently at the face of Moses because of the glory of his face, fading *as* it was,⁸ **how will the ministry of the Spirit** fail to be even more with glory?⁹ For if the ministry of condemnation has glory, much more does **the ministry of righteousness** abound in glory.¹⁰ For indeed what had glory, in this case has no glory because of **the glory that surpasses it**.¹¹ For if that which fades away was with glory, much more **that which remains is in glory**.¹² Therefore having such a hope, we use great boldness in *our* speech,¹³ and *are* not like Moses, *who* used to put a veil over his face so that the sons of Israel would not look intently at the end of what was fading away.¹⁴ But their minds were hardened; for until this very day at the reading of the old covenant the same veil remains unlifted, because it is removed in Christ.¹⁵ But to this day whenever Moses is read, a veil lies over their heart;¹⁶ but whenever a person turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away.¹⁷ **Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty**.¹⁸ But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit. (2 Cor. 3:5-18 NASB)

It is precisely the presence and tutelage of the Spirit which confirms our adoption and its permanent benefits.

In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation—having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise,¹⁴ who is given as a pledge of our inheritance, with a view to the redemption of *God's own* possession, to the praise of His glory. (Eph. 1:13-14 NASB)

When Paul says in Gal. 3: 26 that we **are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus**, he is distinguishing the sonship of NC believers with the sonship of OC Israelites who may or may not have been true believers. OC sonship was only a type of NC sonship, even as Israel was a type of the Church. As always, the antitype (NC sonship) exceeds the type (the sonship of Israel) in splendor and glory. Whereas the sonship of Israel is likened to slavery, the sonship of the New Covenant is likened to an heir coming of age and taking ownership of his father's property.

Now I say, **as long as the heir is a child, he does not differ at all from a slave although he is owner of everything**,² but he is under guardians and managers until the date set by the father.³ So also we, while we were children, were held in bondage under the elemental things of the world.⁴ But when the fullness of the time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law,⁵ **so that He might redeem those who were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption as sons**.⁶ Because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!"⁷ Therefore you are no longer a slave, but a son; and if a son, then an heir through God. (Gal. 4:1-7 NASB)

We must recognize the difference between national adoption and individual adoption. Israel was adopted as a nation, but not every Israelite was individually adopted as a true son.

For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh.²⁹ **But he is a Jew who is one inwardly**; and circumcision is that which is of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter; and his praise is not from men, but from God. (Rom. 2:28-29 NASB)

But *it is* not as though the word of God has failed. For they are not all Israel who are *descended* from Israel;⁷ **nor are they all children because they are Abraham's descendants**, but: "THROUGH ISAAC YOUR DESCENDANTS WILL BE NAMED."⁸ That is, it is **not the children of the flesh who are children of God, but the children of the promise** are regarded as descendants. (Rom. 9:6-8 NASB)

Notice from Rom. 9: 8 that the fleshly descendants of Israel were not, by definition, the children of God, but only the children of promise were true children, that is, those who believed in the promise, as Paul clearly shows in Gal. 3: 29, **And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise.**

What then, are we to make of the passages in Romans 11 and 1 Cor. 10 warning us of the consequences of unbelief? We must not interpret these passages as meaning that our adoption can be revoked. They are merely warnings to make sure that we truly are the adopted children of God and do not falsely presume our adoption, as did the faithless Jews (Jn 8: 39-44). If we are truly adopted children, we will believe—and will keep on believing—in Christ, and we will desire to do the deeds of our Father. If we do not believe the truth or live by that truth, we prove that the Holy Spirit has not come into our hearts producing the filial disposition of a child of God.

F. Sanctification

Westminster Shorter Catechism 35 What is sanctification? A. Sanctification is the work of God's free grace,(1) whereby we are renewed in the whole man after the image of God,(2) and are enabled more and more to die unto sin, and live unto righteousness.(3)

Sanctification is commonly defined as the gradual process by which believers are more and more conformed to the image of Christ in his moral perfections through the mortification (putting to death) of personal sin and the development of positive practical obedience to the commandments of God, both internal and external obedience. Whereas calling, regeneration, justification, and adoption are once-and-for-all, unrepeatable activities of God, progressive sanctification is not a once-and-for-all act but the continual operation of the Holy Spirit upon the called, regenerated, justified, adopted sinner—now called a “saint”—throughout his life until this operation is completed in death.

Another difference is that progressive sanctification requires the participation of every believer with the inward work of the Holy Spirit. This participation is mentioned by Paul in Phil. 2: 12-13 in which he exhorts the Philippian believers to **work out [not for] your salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure.** This is an important text for understanding progressive sanctification and one we will return to later for more detailed analysis. It is sufficient to say here that God, through the agency of the Holy Spirit, generates within us the desire and ability to do His will. The believer, though active and responsible in the process of sanctification, is nevertheless, never alone in the process.

The reader will notice that we have been talking about progressive sanctification, that which takes place as a gradual process. What is often missing in our understanding of sanctification is definitive sanctification another once-and-for-all, non-repeatable activity of God. Therefore, sanctification

is both a process and a definitive, non-repeatable activity. Definitive sanctification is the foundation upon which progressive sanctification is possible and without which it would never occur in the believer's life. John Murray explains the difference in His *Collected Writings*, vol. 2, pp. 217-304. The summary below is based upon his work.

1. Definitive Sanctification

The Apostle Paul tells the Corinthian believers that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God.

Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals,¹⁰ nor thieves, nor *the* covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, will inherit the kingdom of God.¹¹ Such **were** some of you; but **you were washed**, but **you were sanctified**, but **you were justified** in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God. (1 Cor. 6:9-11 NASB)

In verse 11, sanctification is listed along with the washing of regeneration (Titus 3: 5; or it could be a reference to baptism) and with justification as a once-and-for-all act which has already occurred. The tense of the verb, **were sanctified**, is the same as that of **were washed** and **were justified**, the aorist indicative. The aorist tense signifies activity which has occurred as a simple act in the past, not a continuous activity in the past as indicated by the imperfect tense. **Sanctified** and **justified** are passive voice, while **washed** is middle voice. The passive indicates activity which is done to the subject of the verb and not by the subject. In other words, Paul speaks of these Corinthian believers as being the recipients of the activity of justification and sanctification, all of which occurred in past time through God's agency, not by the Corinthians themselves. This leaves the verb, **were washed**, which most translators have rendered in the passive voice.

Likewise in 1 Cor. 1: 2 Paul writes, “...to the church of God which is at Corinth, to those who **have been sanctified in Christ Jesus...**” Here, the verb form is a perfect passive participle. The perfect tense signifies activity which was completed in the past but has continuing results. Paul says that they **have been sanctified**, not “are being sanctified”, although the latter was true as well. The Corinthians were in the process of being sanctified, but this is not the truth Paul is emphasizing. He is emphasizing the fact that they have already been the recipients of sanctification by the Spirit in the past—an amazing statement from Paul considering the many spiritual and moral problems facing the Corinthian church! But he can honestly say this because of the meaning of sanctification. In the OT, the word to **sanctify** is *qadash* meaning “to cut”. Therefore, sanctification implies the activity of separation (cutting off) from something else. God sanctified (cut off) Israel from the other nations and from their evil practices by separating them from these nations and from their practices. Through this act of separation, He also consecrated Israel for Himself.

When we come to the NT, the word **sanctify** (*hagiazō*) has the same meaning, “to separate.” Although many other words are used to express the idea of holiness,

The really characteristic word of the New Testament...is *hagios*. Its primary meaning is that of separation in consecration and devotion to the service of God. With this is connected the idea that what is set aside from the world for God, should also separate itself from the world's defilement and share in God's purity (Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, p. 528).

Berkhof also explains that the personal involvement in separating oneself from the defilement of the world is the reason the words, **holy** or **holiness**, have more often been given an ethical or moral meaning. A “holy” person is most often defined as one who has the subjective quality of being obedient to the Lord. But the word also indicates an objective relationship. A holy person is one who stands, objectively, in a special relationship to God and is consecrated (set apart) for His service. In this sense we understand the phrases **holy apostles**, **holy prophets**, **holy men of God** in Lk 1: 70; Eph. 3: 5; and 2 Pet. 1: 21, respectively. These were people who had a specific function to perform, and they were separated by God from the world to perform that function.

In the same sense Israel was called a **holy nation** and believers are given the same designation in 2 Pet. 2: 9. We are separated from the world in order that we **may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called [us] out of darkness into His marvelous light**. This is the relationship believers sustain to God and to the world. We are objectively (in fact) separated from the world unto God to make Him known to the rest of the world. To do this, we must also develop the ethical character (subjectively) that is distinguished from the world; but it is this objective relationship with God which gives personal, subjective holiness its significance. True holiness is not simply moral improvement for its own sake; it is moral improvement “for God’s sake and with a view to the service of God” (Berkhof, p. 532). In this sense, all holiness is eschatological or oriented toward the future in which the truth of God manifested in the gospel will be vindicated and proven to be true. God will be found to be true and every man a liar (Rom. 3: 4).

It is this sense of personal relationship to God which helps us understand definitive sanctification as a completed activity. In our calling, regeneration, justification, and adoption, we were also sanctified (set apart) to fulfill our purpose of glorifying God. We presently have a new relationship to God and to the world which is not repeatable and not reversible. In terms of this relationship, Christians will never be more sanctified than they already are because this separation was completely and objectively accomplished in Christ. What will happen is that this relationship of separation from the world unto God will become more progressively and subjectively realized in the experience of the believer through the application of the Spirit.

Subjective sanctification (experiential, progressive sanctification) is more effectively realized as the believer more and more relies upon and meditates upon his objective sanctification or relationship to God in Christ. Paul consciously employs this method when he tells the wayward Corinthians that they have already been sanctified. He was not using manipulative psychology, but the profound truth that one’s realization of his relationship to God is fundamentally important in his victory over sin. In the Corinthian church there was division, sexual immorality undisciplined by the church, legal battles between Christians, improper use of the Lord’s Supper, and a host of other problems which could have destroyed it. Nevertheless, Paul addresses them on the basis of their relationship to God as sanctified believers: **to the church of God which is at Corinth, to those who have been sanctified in Christ Jesus, saints by calling, with all who in every place call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, their Lord and ours**. And after having given a catalog of sins in 6: 9-10 he says, **And such were [not are] some of you; but you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and in the Spirit of our God** (v. 11). “You cannot act like this,” he insists, “since you have been set apart for the glory of God.”

It is of paramount [very important] concern for the Christian and for the interests of his sanctification that he should know that sin does not have dominion over him, that the forces of redeeming,

regenerative, and sanctifying grace have been brought to bear upon him in that which is central in his moral and spiritual being, that he is the habitation of God through the Spirit, and that Christ has been formed in him the hope of glory. This is equivalent [equal] to saying that he must reckon himself to be dead indeed unto sin but alive unto God through Jesus Christ his Lord (John Murray, *Redemption Accomplished and Applied*, p.146, emphasis mine).

2. Definitive Sanctification and Union with Christ—Romans 6:2-7:6 (See Murray, Collected Writings, vol. 2, pp. 278-280)

This passage is Paul’s answer to the question anticipated in Rom. 6: 1, “**Are we to continue in sin that grace might increase?**” It is a logical inference from Paul’s explanation of justification by faith in Romans 5. Given the fact that we are justified by grace alone through faith in Christ, and given that where sin increases, the grace of God increases all the more in response to sin, it may seem reasonable that God is more glorified by making his grace triumph over ever-increasing sin. Paul rejects this reasoning with an emphatic negative, “God forbid!” or, more literally, **May it never be**. He then argues that union with Christ in His death and resurrection makes habitual sin impossible for every believer, not just for the “super-spiritual” ones.

In v. 2 Paul says that we (believers) died to sin. The verb tense is aorist indicative signifying a definitive act in the past. To make sure his audience does not miss the point, Paul further explains what he means by **died to sin**. Those **who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death**. What does Paul mean? Does he imply here that through water baptism we have become united with Christ and made partakers of the benefits of His death and resurrection? This baptismal regeneration, but not biblical truth. Baptism is symbolic of the union with Christ which is brought into existence through personal faith in Christ. Baptism does not cause or effect this union; it merely expresses the union which already exists or, in the case of infants, we hope and trust will exist in the future.

By saying that we were baptized into Christ’s death, Paul means that we are united with Him in His death. When Christ died, we died with Him. And how did Christ die? He died (aorist) **once for all** (v. 10, *ephápax*).

who does not need daily, like those high priests, to offer up sacrifices, first for His own sins and then for the *sins* of the people, because this He did **once for all** [*ephapax*] when He offered up Himself. (Heb. 7:27 NASB)

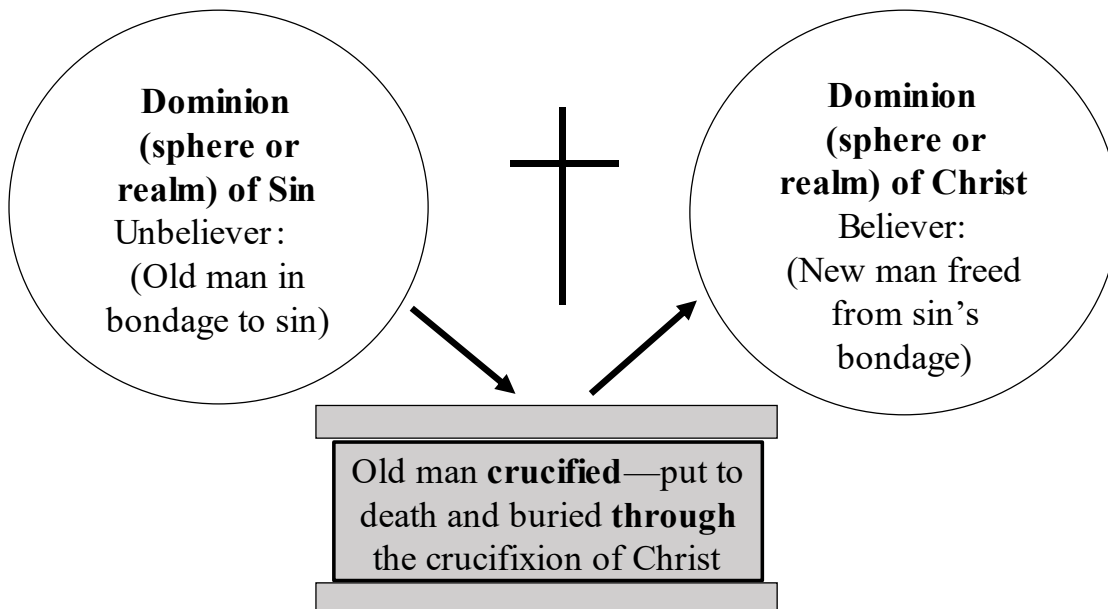
Christ is not now dying gradually. He already died to sin definitively (once for all; *ephápax*) in the past. How then did we die? Our union with Christ in His death demands that we must have died the same way Christ died—once for all or definitively in the past. And to what did we die? We died to sin, or more specifically, to the dominion or reign of sin. In v. 9, Paul says that “**death no longer is master over Him [Christ].**” Previously in Rom. 5 Paul says that “**death reigned**” through sin (vv. 12-14). The reign of death over Christ was due to the penalty of sin Christ vicariously assumed on the cross. The mastery of death over Christ was not due to the mastery of personal sin over Christ. Yet, the sins of His people were imputed to Him, exposing Him to the mastery of death. He became identified with our sin, and our sin was the effective cause of His death mediated through the wrath of God against sin.

After His crucifixion, Christ was no longer subject to death because he no longer lived under its reign. Again, we must remember that Christ's subjection to the reign of death was vicarious (representative) or substitutionary. He never sinned, but objectively He Himself became sin for us (2 Cor. 5: 21) and suffered the dominion of death through the imputation of sin by dying on the cross. When a man dies on earth, he is no longer active and living with respect to the world as he knew it. It is as if he has vanished from the face of the earth, and he now exists in a different realm. We should think of **sin** as a realm or sphere of existence to which Christ and believers are now dead (See Murray, *Collected Writings*, pp. 279-280; *Romans*, pp. 224-225, see quotation below). Christ no longer operates or lives in that sphere where sin reigns through death, and the believers' freedom from the present and future reign of sin is based on the analogy of Christ's deliverance from death (vv. 7, 10-11). Christ will never again live on this present earth as He once did, under the Law and subject to its curse. He is freed from that burden through death on the cross. Because we are united to Him in His death, we also no longer live or operate in the realm or sphere of sin. Like Christ, we are freed from the realm of sin which no longer has dominion over us. Even physical death will not have dominion over us. It is true that we still sin and that we will still die physically, but this fact does not cancel the truth that we do not live and operate within the sphere of sin and death and under its dominion. If we do live under sin's dominion, we are not united to Christ in His death; we are not Christians.

Murray acknowledges the difficulty of Rom. 6: 10. **For the death that He died, He died to sin once for all; but the life that He lives, He lives to God.** (Rom. 6:10 NASB)

Admittedly it is difficult to determine the force of this expression. In verse 2 the same formula is used with reference to our death to sin and in verse 11 we are said "to be dead to sin". Is it possible to apply the same meaning to the death of Christ? It would appear to be arbitrary to interpret the formula as it applies to Christ in a way entirely different from the meaning in verse 2 and 11. Furthermore, there is a parallelism between verses 10 and 11, Christ's dying to sin once (vs. 10) being parallel to our being dead to sin (vs. 11), and Christ's living to God (vs.10) being parallel to our living to God in Christ Jesus (vs. 11). The parallels indicate similitude, and if Christ's dying to sin bears no analogy to our death to sin the similitude would break down. So we shall have to proceed on the assumption that the formula as it applies to us provides the direction in which we are to seek the meaning as it applies to Christ.

As applied to believers in verse 2 and 11 the thought is that they died to the power of sin. May the same be said of Christ? It cannot be said of Christ that sin exercised its power over him in the same sense in which it ruled over us. We were the bond-slaves of sin in its defilement and power; sin did not thus rule over him. Nevertheless, Christ was identified in such a way with the sin which he vicariously bore that he dealt not only with its guilt but also with its power. Death ruled over him until he broke its power (vs. 9). So sin may be said to have ruled over him in that his humiliation state was conditioned by the sin with which he was vicariously identified. He was made sin (II Cor. 5: 21), and sin as power must be taken into account in this relationship. It was by his own dying that he destroyed the power of sin, and in his resurrection he entered upon a state that was not conditioned by sin. There is good reason to believe that it is this victory over sin as power that the apostle has in view when he says that Christ "died to sin once". And it is because Christ triumphed over the power of sin in his death that those united to him in his death die to the power of sin and become dead to sin (vss. 2, 11) (*Romans*, pp. 224-225, emphasis mine).



There is a total difference between surviving sin and reigning sin, the regenerate in conflict with sin and the unregenerate complacent to sin. It is one thing for sin to live in us: it is another for us to live in sin. It is one thing for the enemy to occupy the capital; it is another for his defeated hosts to harass the garrisons of the kingdom (Murray, *Redemption Accomplished and Applied*, p. 145).

Our death with Christ is further confirmed by the indicative (statement of fact) in Rom. 6: 6, **knowing this, that our old self [old man] was crucified with Him, that our body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin...** The verb tense used, aorist passive, once again indicates a decisive action in the past. The old man is presented to us as being decisively put to death with Christ on the cross, not progressively being crucified. This interpretation is confirmed by the connection which the crucifixion of the old man sustains to the crucifixion of Christ. Christ was not gradually or progressively crucified, but once and for all crucified in a single day. It is therefore incorrect to consider the Christian as both old man and new man simultaneously. To have taught otherwise Paul would have confused the main thrust of his argument, namely, that there has been a once and for all break with the realm and rule of sin in which the old man lived. On the other hand, the new, regenerate, man in Christ lives in a new realm altogether. To claim that the Christian is both the old man and the new man, Murray insists, is to say that he is both regenerate and unregenerate at the same time, an impossibility.

Furthermore, Paul says that Christ has been raised from the dead, never to die again (Rom. 6: 9). And since the believer has died with Christ and is raised from the dead spiritually, it would be inconsistent with the analogy to say that the believer's old man is continually being crucified. In such a case, he would also have to be continually raised from the dead. This continuous cycle of being crucified and raised from the dead does not fit the analogy which Paul makes between the death and resurrection of the Christian and the death and resurrection of Christ. There was no cycle of crucifixion and resurrection with Christ, and there is none for the Christian. Rather, the Christian is to reckon his death and resurrection to be a completed fact which emerges often into his consciousness (cf. John Murray, *Principles of Conduct*, pp. 209-218).

Colossians 3: 9-10 teaches the same principle, namely, that the old man has been **laid aside** (aorist participle) and the new man has been **put on** (aorist participle).

Do not lie to one another, since you laid aside the old self with its *evil* practices,¹⁰ and have put on the new self who is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him—(Col. 3:9-10 NASB)

The verb tenses do not indicate a gradual process of laying aside and putting on. Besides, such continual laying aside and putting on simultaneously would produce inconsistency in Paul's figure of speech. A person cannot be continually laying aside one garment and continually putting on another at one and the same time. Such a picture would present an absurdity. It may be argued that Ephesians 4: 22 implies the responsibility of the Christian to lay aside the old man.

that, in reference to your former manner of life, you lay aside the old self, which is being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit,²³ and that you be renewed in the spirit of your mind,²⁴ and put on the new self, which in *the likeness of God* has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth. (Eph. 4:22-24 NASB)

This text would seem to indicate that the old man is still alive and must be put aside. I will offer a brief summary of Murray's argument against this interpretation. First, Colossians and Ephesians are twin epistles and we should expect the meaning of one passage to be the same as the other. In this case, the passage in Colossians is clearer and should guide us in our interpretation of Ephesians. Second, the characterization of the **old self** given in vv. 17-19 cannot fit the description of the true believer.

So this I say, and affirm together with the Lord, that you walk no longer just as the Gentiles also walk, in the futility of their mind,¹⁸ **being darkened in their understanding, excluded from the life of God** because of the ignorance that is in them, **because of the hardness of their heart**;¹⁹ and they, having become callous, **have given themselves over to sensuality for the practice of every kind of impurity with greediness.** (Eph. 4:17-19 NASB)

Third, the description of vv. 17-19 is presented by Paul as being the believer's "**former manner of life**" (v.22), not his present manner of life. The former manner of life is the life of the old man who has been crucified. Fourth, learning Christ and being taught in Christ (vv. 20-21) is the condition which leads to putting off the old man and putting on the new.

But you did not learn Christ in this way,²¹ if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught in Him, just as truth is in Jesus, (Eph. 4:20-21 NASB)

Therefore, putting off the old man and putting on the new are consequences which have followed from learning Christ, consequences which we would expect to have already taken place in the past.

Union with Christ in His death is not the whole picture; we are also united to Him in His resurrection. When he rose; we rose with Him. In Rom. 6: 5, we learn that union with Him in His death is the guarantee that we will be with Him also in His resurrection. **For if we have become united with Him in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall be also in the likeness of His resurrection...**The implications of this statement are not limited to life in heaven but have profound application to life here and now. They are found in the previous verse in which Paul says that because we have been buried with Christ in death, we also will be raised up with Him to "**walk**

in newness of life.” This is a repetition of the new life mentioned by Paul in Gal. 2: 20 in which he says, **I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me, and delivered Himself up for me.** With reference to the old life before Christ, Paul is decisively dead, and what is true of Paul is true of us. We no longer live and operate in that realm—a fact which Paul expresses eloquently when he says, **through which [the cross] the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world** (Gal. 6: 14). We have been raised up to a new world in which we walk in newness of life.

Resurrection with Christ is also expressed in Rom. 6: 8 in which Paul says, **Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him.** Again, Paul is not talking about heaven, but here and now. We are presently living with Christ in the new realm in which sin and death do not reign. This may, indeed, seem to contradict our experience since life in this world hardly seems to be free from sin’s dominion. Nevertheless, we must reckon (calculate) these things to be true even if they don’t seem to be true at times. The more we grow in grace the more sensitive we become to our personal sin. We cry out with Paul, **Wretched man that I am, who will deliver me from the body of this death** (Rom. 7: 24). But this wretchedness will be present even when we are making progress in our faith, and we must not interpret remaining sin as reigning sin.

In v. 11 Paul exhorts us, **Even so consider yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus.** This is not the psychology of positive thinking—to make ourselves happy by thinking happy thoughts. It is not some Eastern-mystical, five-word mantra (“I am dead to sin.”) repeated over and over to ourselves while sitting cross-legged on the ground, emptied of all other thoughts. It is the profound truth of the Bible. We are dead to sin as a realm and way of life, and alive to God in Christ Jesus in a new realm and way of life, and we are to remind ourselves often of this change of “address”.

It is faith of this fact that provides the basis for, and the incentive to the fulfillment of, the exhortation, “Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body to the end that ye should obey its lusts, neither present your members as instruments of unrighteousness to sin, but present yourselves to God as those alive from the dead and your members as instruments of righteousness to God” (Rom. 6: 12, 13). In this matter the indicative [statement of fact] lies at the basis of the imperative [the command] and our faith of fact is indispensable to the discharge of duty. The faith that sin will not have the dominion is the dynamic in bondservice to righteousness and to God so that we may have the fruit unto holiness and the end everlasting life (Rom. 6: 17, 22) (Murray, *Redemption*, p. 146).

Thus, it is only on the basis of this truth that Paul exhorts us not to let sin reign in our bodies (vv. 12-13). This may sound like double-talk. Why does Paul tell us not to let sin reign when sin cannot reign over the Christian. But we may as well ask why there are so many warnings in Scripture to Christians not to apostatize from the Christian faith when the profound truth is: a true believer will never apostatize (Heb. 6: 1-9; 1 Jn 2: 18-19; 1 Cor. 10: 1-13; Phil. 1: 6). Warnings are given for one purpose: to warn. The warnings appeal to our personal responsibility to be actively vigilant in our walk with the Lord and our fight against sin. In this sense they are not hypothetical (assumed for the sake of an argument) but are real warnings. If we deny our faith in Christ and persist in this denial, we will certainly be lost. Warnings are designed to keep this from happening, and they are a means of grace. The exhortation, **do not let sin reign**, has the same purpose; it is a means of grace.

We should not conclude from this exhortation that sin can actually reign in the Christian any more than we should conclude from the warnings against apostasy that the genuine Christian can lose his salvation. This would be a denial of everything Paul had said previously about Christ dying to the rule and realm of sin and the Christian dying with him—statements of fact. The exhortation (command) is based on the indicative (statement of fact) that the Christian is dead to sin. And since we are dead to sin and alive to God, we should live this way. Notice that Paul follows the exhortations of vv. 12-13 with another powerful indicative, **For sin shall not be master over you** (v. 14). The statement of fact is a strong incentive for the Christian to actively put sin to death in his actual experience.

To say to the slave who has not been emancipated, “Do not behave as a slave” is to mock his enslavement. But to say the same to the slave who has been set free is the necessary appeal to put into effect the privileges and rights of his liberation (Murray, *Romans*, p. 227).

The newly emancipated slave must be continually reminded not to act as a slave but as a free man. Though free, in many ways he still thinks and acts like a slave. When he meets his former master in the marketplace, he is very likely to fear him even as before. If his master shouts an order, he is also likely to slavishly obey. Since sin is so engrained in our thinking and acting, even those who have been believers for years must constantly remind themselves not to act like **slaves** of sin, but as those who have been freed from its bondage. But our behavior must be rooted in truth, not in fiction or wishful thinking. If we are still under the reign of sin, there is no use resisting sin. But if sin cannot dominate us, we have the incentive to resist it. To use another illustration, suppose it were possible to look into the future at the final score of a football game, and suppose we foresaw that our team won the game. What would be the effect of that knowledge on the team’s performance? Knowing the final score was in their favor, such knowledge would incentivize the team to play its best. This is precisely what knowledge of the truth does for the Christian. Roman Catholicism and Arminianism teach otherwise. These two systems teach that eternal security produces carelessness and sinful license. The Bible teaches otherwise. Eternal security—God’s preserving grace—produces encouragement and the determination to keep putting sin to death. Why else would the Apostle John write an entire epistle to assure believers of their salvation?

These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, **so that you may know that you have eternal life.** (1 Jn. 5:13 NASB)

Knowing that Satan cannot ultimately and finally defeat him, the Christian has all the incentive he needs to keep fighting. The battle must still be fought, but the war is already won in Christ Jesus. But if the Christian can fall perilously just before the finish line, this reduces his incentive to keep running the race.

To a large extent the progress of sanctification is dependent upon the increasing understanding and appropriation of the implications of that identification with Christ in his death and resurrection. Nothing is more relevant to progressive sanctification than the reckoning of ourselves to be dead to sin and alive to God through Jesus Christ (cf. Rom. 6: 11). And when Paul contemplates the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus and the hope of resurrection, nothing is more characteristic of his present preoccupation than to know Christ ‘and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable to his death (Phil. 3: 10) (Murray, *Collected Writings*, Vol. 2, p. 311).

3. Progressive Sanctification

As much as we may wish to be experientially holy at the moment of justification and definitive sanctification, it is painfully evident that there is remaining (not reigning) sin in the believer which must be progressively put to death. The base of operations for this warfare has already been supplied in our union with Christ in his death, burial, and resurrection. With His help, we are now commanded **to work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure** (Phil. 2: 12b-13). For clarity I will divide the subject of progressive sanctification into several headings.

a. The Necessity of Progressive Sanctification—Indwelling Sin in the Believer (Rom. 7: 14-25)

One of the most debated passages of Scripture is Rom. 7: 14-25. In this passage, is Paul talking about himself before his conversion to Christ or after? Or is he not talking about his own experience at all, but man in general or the Jews in particular separated from Christ and under the law? (An alternative interpretation noted in Chamblin, *Paul and the Self*, p. 171). Many scholars answer this question differently. I believe Paul is speaking as a believer who is keenly and painfully aware of the remaining corruptions of his flesh. (For a fuller explanation, see my notes on Romans 7. In Rom. 7: 1-13, Paul is speaking of himself before conversion, in vv. 14-25, post-conversion.)

As we read his self-assessment, it is incorrect to think that Paul is giving us a “statistical history” of his successes and failures in “doing good” (v. 21; John Murray, *Romans*, p. 273). Murray’s note about Paul’s “statistical history” is given only incidentally at the end of his exegesis of this section of *Romans*; but this, I believe, is part of the confusion which has plagued expositors’ interpretation of this section as Paul’s life before conversion.

As Murray explains earlier,

When Paul says that he did not perform what he willed (cf. vs. 15), we are not to suppose that his determinate will to the good came to no effective fruition in practice. This would be universalizing the apostle’s language beyond all reasonable limits (pp. 272-273; emphasis mine).

This fact should be especially kept in mind considering Paul’s extraordinary sensitivity to his own imperfection compared to his desired goal of absolute perfection (Phil. 3: 10-14). For Paul, any personal want of conformity to the law of God was a serious matter, contrary to the careless attitude of many professing Christians who are often casual about their sin.

His statement, **“I am of flesh, sold into bondage to sin,”**

is stated categorically and without qualification, not because this is the whole truth about Paul the Christian, but because it is the only part of the truth about himself that the law can tell him (Packer, *Keep in Step with the Spirit*, p. 267, emphasis mine).

That Paul is not describing himself as a person under sin’s dominion is borne out in Rom. 8, and only a brief comparison with this chapter will bear this out. Considerable attention is given by Paul to the frame of mind or “determinate will” (a designation Murray uses throughout his exegesis, pp. 263, 264, 266, 267) with which he regards the law of God and obedience to that law. A collection of these references may help us to see this.

v. 15— “...for I am not practicing what **I would like** to do, but I am doing the very thing **I hate**.”

v. 16— “But if I do the very thing **I do not wish** to do, **I agree with the Law**, confessing that it is good.”

v. 18— “...for the **wishing** is present in me...”

v. 19— “For the good that **I wish**, I do not do; but I practice the very evil that **I do not wish**.”

v. 20— “But if I am doing the very thing **I do not wish**...”

v. 21— “I find then the principle that evil is present in me, the one who *wishes* to do good.”

vv. 22-23— “For **I joyfully concur** with the law of God in the **inner man**, but I see a different law in the members of my body, waging war against the *law of my mind*...”

v. 25— “So then, on the one hand **I myself with my mind** am serving the law of God...”

By emphasizing various words in these verses, we have a window into the deepest longings of the apostle to act in full accord with the law of God—**the good**. Such repetition of these longings found throughout the passage has prompted Murray to conclude,

That the captivity to sin of which Paul here speaks is alien to his most characteristic self and will is abundantly attested by the verses which follow [i.e., vv. 15-25]. It becomes clear how different are the two states, that of one man who with resolute and abandoned will sells himself to iniquity and that of the other who reproaches himself for the sin he commits and bemoans his being carried away captive by it...(*Romans*, p. 261, emphasis mine).

...there can be no question but “the inward man” of verse 22 refers to what Paul was in his inmost spirit, in the center of his personality, and it is also true that “the inward man” approximates to, if it is not to be identified with, the “mind” of verses 23, 25... (p. 265).

²³but I see a different law in the members of my body, waging war against **the law of my mind** and making me a prisoner of the law of sin which is in my members.

²⁵ Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, on the one hand I myself **with my mind** am serving the law of God, but on the other, **with my flesh** the law of sin.

However, Murray warns against finding a Hellenistic mind-body dichotomy in Paul’s language as if the mind is good and the body is sinful. The distinction is between Paul’s **mind** and his **flesh**, not between his **mind** and his **body** (pp. 265-266).

In a word, he identifies himself in his deepest and most determinate will with the law of God which is good. What is more reasonable than to infer that he calls this determinate will to the good (with which he identifies his self) “the inward man”? As he makes moral assessment of himself, as he analyses himself and his conduct in the light of ethical criteria, he finds that that which represents his deepest and truest self is the determinate will to the good and it is that deepest and truest self he calls “the inward Man”...Paul’s affirmation is that, notwithstanding all the frustration of his determinate will to the good, he delights in the law of the Lord. And this delight is not peripheral [on

the surface only] but belongs to that which is deepest and inmost in his moral and spiritual being (p. 266).

This determinate will to do **good**—a description Paul gives to the law of God in 7: 12—and the serving of the law of God with his **mind** should be seen in stark contrast to the mind of the unbeliever in Chapter 8. In that chapter, **those who are according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who are according to the Spirit, [set their minds on—words which may be reasonably inferred] the things of the Spirit** (v. 5). In this verse, **those who are according to the flesh** is opposed to **we know that the law is spiritual** (7: 14) and the **us, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit** (8: 4). Paul is clearly allying himself with those whose **minds** are set on the things of the Spirit, the same **mind** which is serving the law of God (7: 25). Furthermore, we notice from 8: 4 that the mind set on the Spirit is fulfilling the requirements of the law of God. There is no contradiction between Paul's mental orientation to the goodness of the law in chapter 7 and his emphasis upon the work of the Spirit in Chapter 8.

To continue this contrast further, Paul says that **the mind set on the flesh is death and is hostile toward God; for it does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able to do so...**" (vv. 6-7). This description must be seen against the descriptions given in the tabulation of references above in which Paul identifies himself as a man whose mind is whole-heartedly devoted to the **good**, the law of God, although he sees frustrating contradictions in his behavior. It seems clear that **the mind set on the flesh** and the **mind hostile toward God** in Rom. 8 is not the same mind **serving the law of God** and continually **willing** to do good in Rom. 7.

Unless we are to suppose that Paul had reversed his anthropology within the space of less than ten verses, we are surely forced by this to conclude that in Rom. 7: 14-25 Paul is not, after all, describing a man in Adam, but a man in Christ (Packer, p.268).

Chamblin notes that

Even those who argue that he reflects here upon preconversion experience acknowledge that he does so with Christian insight. "The misery of the unredeemed man is described from the standpoint of the redeemed man," writes Günther Bornkamm. Thus if 7: 14b ("sold as a slave to Sin") describes the nonbeliever, it is a condition which becomes plain only to the eyes of faith. For Sin deceives its slaves (7: 11), blinding them to their actual state. Only the Christian can know that "nothing good dwells within me, that is, in my flesh" (7: 18), and perceive that one is (or used to be) Sin's prisoner (7; 23) (Knox Chamblin, *Paul and the Self*, p. 172, emphasis mine).

In other words, the unbeliever is not capable of understanding his sinful condition in the same way that Paul describes it in v. 14. He simply lacks this perspective. Therefore, even **sold under sin**, while used to prove the perspective of an unregenerate man in vv. 14-25, does just the opposite. It suggests the perspective of the regenerate man.

...the counterthrust of Romans 7: 14-25 is inescapable. Paul's shift from the past tense to the present in verse 14 has no natural explanation save that he now moves on from talking about his experience with God's law in his pre-Christian days to talking about his experience as it was at the time of writing. Any other view represents him as an inept communicator, who, by making a needless and pointless change of tense, was asking to be misunderstood. The same representation follows from supposing that the *I* of verses 7-25 is not Paul himself, but some imaginary figure. It surely is unplausible to

accuse Paul, who ordinarily communicates so clearly, of being so stupid here (Packer, *Keep in Step with the Spirit*, pp. 143-144).

This brings me—and hopefully the reader—to the conclusion that sin continues to frustrate the believer who has been definitively sanctified by the blood of Jesus Christ and progressively sanctified by the operation of the Spirit. There is, therefore, the necessity for every believer to grow in the grace and the knowledge of Christ to the end that he may progressively imitate Christ in all his perfections. If Paul's own personal experience is any indication for us, then we may also conclude that progressive sanctification will never reach its destination point in the present life. If Paul had never reached perfection by the time he was imprisoned in Rome and wrote Philippians (Phil. 1: 7; 3: 12), it is highly unlikely that any of us will.

Those who believe they have reached such perfection are given fair warning, **If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves, and the truth is not in us** (1 Jn. 1: 8). There were none in John's audience, at least, who could be cited as exceptions to this rule. It is one of Satan's most clever deceptions to convince us that we are much better than we really are, for if he can succeed in this, we will no longer be exercised in our conscience, as Paul obviously was (Rom. 7), to mortify (put to death) the remaining sin in our lives.

A parallel to Romans 7 is found in Galatians 5.

For **the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh**; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please. (Gal. 5:17 NASB)

The things that you please [or, **will**], according to one interpretation, are the things we wish to do in cooperation with the Spirit, but because of the opposition of the **flesh**, we are hindered from doing those things. This interpretation is consistent with the psychology of the struggle in Romans 7. The flesh often wins. (So interpreted by Calvin and Luther.)

A second interpretation is that **the things that you please** [**will**] are the cravings of the flesh which the Spirit within us hinders us from doing. This interpretation would appear more in keeping with the context of Gal. 5: 16 in which Paul assures us that if we walk by the Spirit we **will not carry out the desire of the flesh**. This assurance is followed by the explanation, **for the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh...** In other words, "You will not be able to bite and devour one another because as you walk by the Spirit, He (the Spirit) is opposing the desire of the flesh within you." In 5:17 Paul is concerned to show the sufficiency of the Spirit in restraining the **will** of the flesh. (So interpreted by Chrysostom and John Brown.)

But there is a third position in which **the things that you please** can be interpreted as either the **will** (*thélō*) of the flesh or the godly **will** (*thélō*) to do good. There is an ongoing contest between **flesh** and **Spirit**, and the verse simply speaks of the contest itself, not of the result of this contest (as in Rom. 7). Sometimes the Christian follows the lead of the Spirit and does good, but at other times he follows the flesh and does evil.

"The spirit wrestles against your doing the things which [you] would [do] on the impulse of the flesh, and the flesh struggles against your doing the things which [you] would [do] on the impulse of the spirit" (John Eadie, *Galatians*, p. 411, emphasis mine).

This is also the opinion of Meyer.

If he would do what is good, the flesh, striving against the Spirit, is opposed to this: if he would do what is evil, the Spirit, striving against the flesh, is opposed to that (H. A. W. Meyer, *Galatians*, p. 236, emphasis his).

J.I. Packer further unpacks Paul's meaning in Gal. 5: 17 which will also give us a better perspective on Rom. 7: 14-25.

...there is no room for uncertainty as to what Paul is telling us here in Galatians about the reality of conflict in the Christian life. You must realize, he says, that there are two opposed sorts of desire in every Christian's makeup. [Notice that Packer does not mention the old man and the new man.] The opposition between them appears at the level of motive. There are desires that express the natural anti-God egoism of fallen human nature, and there are desires that express the supernatural, God-honoring, God-loving motivation that is implanted by new birth. Now because he has in him these opposite motivational urgings, one holding him back whenever the other draws him forward, the Christian finds that his heart is never absolutely pure, nor does he ever do anything that is absolutely right, even though his constant goal is perfect service of God...In this sense he is being prevented every moment from doing what he wants to do. He lives with the knowledge that everything he has done might and should have been better: not only the lapses into which pride, weakness, and folly have betrayed him, but also his attempts to do what was right and good. After each such attempt and each particular action, he regularly sees specific ways in which it could have been improved, both motivationally and in performance. What feels at the time like the best he could do does not appear so in retrospect. He spends his life reaching after perfection and finding that his reach always exceeds his grasp.

This does not of course mean that he never achieves righteousness in any measure at all. Paul is envisioning a Christian life not of constant, total defeat, but of constant moral advance. "...Walk by [in] the Spirit, and do not gratify the desires of the flesh," is the direct summons of Galatians 5: 16, a summons to which verse 17 is attached as a mere explanatory footnote. It is clear both here and wherever else Paul teaches Christian conduct that he expects the believer always to be moving forward in the formation of godly habits and the practice of active Christlikeness...

The point I am developing out of Paul's words in verse 17 is only this: The Christian who thus walks in the Spirit will keep discovering that nothing in his life is as good as it should be; that he has never fought as hard as he might have done against the clogging restraints and contrary pulls of his own inbred perversity; that there is an element of motivational sin, at least, in his best works; that his daily living is streaked with defilement, so that he has to depend every moment on God's pardoning mercy in Christ or he would be lost; and that he needs to keep asking, in the light of his own felt weakness and inconstancy of heart, that the Spirit will energize him to the end to maintain the inward struggle. "You cannot achieve as much in the way of holiness as you want to achieve" (J.I. Packer, *Keep in Step with the Spirit*, pp. 35-37).

Further comment on Gal. 5: 17 comes later in Packer's book.

These words alert us to the reality of tension, the necessity of effort, and the incompleteness of achievement that mark the life of holiness in this world. The desires of the Spirit in Paul's sentence are the inclinations of our renewed heart; the desires of the flesh are the contrary inclinations of "...sin which dwells within me" (Romans 7: 20). The anti-God energy that indwelling sin repeatedly looses

[i.e. releases] in the form of temptations, delusions, and distractions keeps total perfection beyond our grasp. By total perfection I mean what Wesley called "angelical" perfection, in which everything is as right and wise and wholehearted and God honoring as it could possibly be. The born-again believer who is in good spiritual health aims each day at perfect obedience, perfect righteousness, and perfect pleasing of his heavenly Father; it is his nature to do so, as we have seen. Does he ever achieve it? Not in this world. In this respect he cannot do what he would...

So we need to remember that any idea of getting beyond conflict, outward or inward, in our pursuit of holiness in this world is an escapist dream that can only have disillusioning and demoralizing effects on us as waking experience daily disproves it. What we must realize, rather, is that any real holiness in us will be under hostile fire all the time, just as our Lord's was. "Consider him," wrote the writer to the Hebrews "who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted. In your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood" (Heb. 12: 3,4)—but you may have to one day, as did Jesus before you, for there are no holds barred in this struggle (*Keep in Step with the Spirit*, pp. 110-111).

Paul's testimony of remaining sin and his urging to mortify sin are evidence that sin is still a continuing threat to the believer.

...for if you are living according to the flesh, you must die; but if by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live (Rom. 8: 13).

But now you also, put them all aside: anger, wrath, malice, slander, *and* abusive speech from your mouth (Col. 3: 8).

For this is the will of God, your sanctification; *that is*, that you abstain from sexual immorality" (1 Thess. 4: 3).

...and do not go on presenting the members of your body to sin *as* instruments of unrighteousness; but present yourselves to God as those alive from the dead, and your members *as* instruments of righteousness to God (Rom. 6: 13).

Flee immorality. Every *other* sin that a man commits is outside the body, but the immoral man sins against his own body (1 Cor. 6: 18).

Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God (2 Cor. 7: 1).

And if we have food and covering, with these we shall be content. But those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a snare and many foolish and harmful desires which plunge men into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all sorts of evil, and some by longing for it have wandered away from the faith, and pierced themselves with many a pang. But flee from these things, you man of God; and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, perseverance *and* gentleness. Fight the good fight of faith; take hold of the eternal life to which you were called, and you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses (1 Tim. 6: 8-12).

Let us behave properly as in the day, not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual promiscuity and sensuality, not in strife and jealousy (Rom. 13: 13).

Continuing quotations from Peter, James, John, and the author of Hebrews should not be necessary. It cannot be argued that Paul is only talking to the unredeemed sinners in these congregations. He admonishes Timothy to flee from these things, a clear indication that Timothy—who is given nothing but good press reports elsewhere in Scripture—was not beyond the reach of these sins. Until Timothy died, the fight of faith was not over. From the looks of things, the church of the NT did not consist of any entirely sanctified people, else why all the admonitions against sin? And if there were any such saints available to the church, why are they not named as possible resources for the rest of the sinners? (For more reading on Romans 7, see my commentary.)

b. The substance of progressive sanctification—obedience to the law of God and the Fruit of the Spirit

Many Christians insist that since the believer is no longer “under law”, the law can no longer be a relevant issue for our sanctification. There are many passages of Scripture which, on the surface, would lend support for this view. In 2 Cor. 3: 18, Paul concludes his contrast between the ministry of the old covenant and that of the new covenant with the following words,

“But we all, with unveiled face beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit.”

The verb **are being transformed** is present passive indicative indicating continuing activity. We are constantly being transformed into the image of Christ. Paul does not say that we are already completely transformed into Christ’s image, in which case he may have used an aorist or imperfect verb. Our transformation in this life is not complete; this will have to wait for glorification, but it is nevertheless underway and proceeding as planned. This is the very purpose of our predestination, that we should be holy and blameless (Eph. 1: 4; Phil. 1: 6; Rom. 8: 29).

Secondly, this transformation is taking place as we are beholding the glory of Christ as in a mirror. The analogy brings us back to an earlier statement of Paul in 1 Cor. 13: 12 in which he says that we see Christ only dimly in a mirror, but there will be a day in which we see him face to face. Putting these two verses together, the idea is that we are gradually being transformed into the image of Christ as we grow in our understanding of who He is in all his glory and perfection. How do we grow in this understanding? We grow as we focus our attention upon Christ and what he has done for us.

This appears to be the clear teaching of Paul in so many contexts when he exhorts the church to godly behavior. In the church of Philippi strife between two women (4: 2-3)—and probably among others (2: 1-4)—was hindering the good work characteristically done by the church (1: 7; 5: 14-16). Notice how Paul goes about dealing with the problem. He presents them with a portrait of Christ, who is God, but was willing to set aside his divine privileges and prerogatives as God to become a man, live as a man, suffer as a man, and subject himself to a cruel, ignoble death as if he were the worst of men. He did all of this for the salvation of his people, and because he did this, God highly exalted him and bestowed on him a name above all names (2: 5-11). Paul’s strategy in the passage was that by focusing their attention upon Christ and his selfless perfections, they would focus less of their attention upon themselves and their selfish interests and ambitions.

He uses this same strategy in writing to the Corinthian church who had promised a gift of charity to the destitute church in Jerusalem (2 Cor. 8-9; cf. Rom. 15: 26). Rather than focusing upon the

law of tithes and offerings, or the law against coveting, Paul rivets their attention upon the generosity of Christ.

“I am not speaking *this* as a command, but as proving through the earnestness of others the sincerity of your love also. **For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ**, that though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich” (2 Cor. 8: 8-9).

Other examples include the following:

But **put on the Lord Jesus Christ**, and make no provision for the flesh in regard to *its* lusts. (Rom. 13:14 NASB)

Each of us is to please his neighbor for his good, to his edification. ³ **For even Christ did not please Himself**; but as it is written, "THE REPROACHES OF THOSE WHO REPROACHED YOU FELL ON ME."⁴ For whatever was written in earlier times was written for our instruction, so that through perseverance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope. ⁵ Now may the God who gives perseverance and encouragement **grant you to be of the same mind with one another according to Christ Jesus**,⁶ so that with one accord you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.⁷ Therefore, accept one another, **just as Christ also accepted us** to the glory of God. (Rom. 15:2-7 NASB)

Be imitators of me, just as I also am of Christ. (1 Cor. 11:1 NASB)

Bear one another's burdens, and thereby fulfill the law of Christ. (Gal. 6:2 NASB)

But may it never be that I would boast, except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. (Gal. 6:14 NASB)

This focus has led many to believe that we no longer need the law of the OT but only Christ. But this conclusion is mistaken. In the texts cited, Paul draws our attention to the moral perfection of Christ. Christ is the selfless Savior who loves his neighbor perfectly as himself. He is the perfect husband who laid down his life to sanctify his bride, the church. He is the perfect Son who honored his Father and obeyed his will even unto death. He was the perfect high priest who was tempted in all things as we are yet without sin. Christ kept the law of God in a way which no other man could, and by doing so he proved that He was the fullness of God (Col. 1: 19) and the word of God made flesh (Jn. 1). He did not keep this law only to set it aside; fulfilling the law was not for the purpose of abolishing it.

"Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven.¹⁷ **"Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish but to fulfill.**¹⁸ "For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, **not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass from the Law until all is accomplished.**¹⁹ "Whoever then annuls one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others *to do* the same, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever keeps and teaches *them*, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.²⁰ "For I say to you that unless your righteousness surpasses *that* of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven. (Matt. 5:16-20 NASB)

Doing **good works before men** in v. 16 is related contextually to **the Law** in v. 17 and the **commandments** in v. 19. It is a mistake, Jesus says, to assume that He came to abolish the law (**Do not think**); rather, He came to fulfill it.

The law is abolished as a covenantal system demanding perfect righteousness as the grounds for acceptance with God (cf. Charles Hodge, *Romans*, pp. 217-219), but the individual requirements of the law reflecting his moral perfection are not abolished. (Adultery and murder are still forbidden; cf. my notes on “The Continuity of the Moral Law of the Old Covenant” in “The Doctrine of Man”).

It is impossible to focus upon the glory of Christ without giving attention to the glory of his perfect life of obedience to the Father in everything he did and taught. His best known teaching is the Sermon on the Mount in which he focused on the moral teaching of the OT presented with a new and refreshing emphasis upon the motives of the heart (cf. Vern Poythress, *The Shadow of Christ in the Law of Moses*, and my comments in “Christ the New Law Giver” in “The Doctrine of Man”). The new covenant itself is described in Jeremiah 31: 33 and Heb. 8: 10 in terms of the law of God being written on the heart (cf. 2 Cor. 3: 3; Ezek. 36: 26-27). Unless otherwise stated, the law written on the heart must be none other than the one given to Israel and repeated throughout the NT except for the Jewish components of sacrifices and ceremonies clearly fulfilled in the non-repeatable sacrifice and continuing priesthood of Christ (*Hebrews*, 1 Cor. 9: 21). In the new covenant we have much more than the letters engraved in stones, but the person of Christ who demonstrates perfect obedience to the law.

It is beyond the scope of this course to sort out how the OT case laws contained in Ex. 21—24 and elsewhere in the Pentateuch are still valid for today, case laws which were the applications of the Ten Commandments relevant to the Israelite nation as a theocracy. (For a very clear, but concise assessment of the case laws, see Henry Krabbendam, *Christian Doctrine, A Comprehensive Survey*, unpublished, pp. 151-153, and Vern Poythress, *The Shadow of Christ in the Law of Moses*). Rather, I am simply maintaining the continuity of God’s holiness asserted throughout the Scriptures—holiness exemplified and confirmed in the person of Jesus Christ who said, **For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me** (Jn. 6: 38), and **“Therefore, you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect”** (Matt. 5: 48). The law is the transcript of God’s perfection.

Yet, we must be warned against the legal obedience of the Pharisees (cf. Krabbendam, p. 140). Obedience without love is only partial obedience unacceptable to God. As parents we not only wish our children to obey us, but to obey us because of the relationship of love we enjoy with them and they with us. This kind of obedience—evangelical obedience—can only be generated by the Holy Spirit who produces **the fruit of the Spirit** within us. Thus, the substance of sanctification is not just obedience to the law, but the fruit of the Spirit (Krabbendam, p. 150).

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,²³ gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. (Gal. 5:22-23 NASB)

It should be noted in Gal. 5 that the **works** of the flesh and the **fruit** of the Spirit draw attention to the distinction between human endeavor and the Spirit’s empowerment (Gordon D. Fee, *God’s Empowering Presence*, p. 444). The Spirit is superior to the law which in the hands of sinners (Rom. 7: 10-13) could not accomplish the sanctification God intended for his people. **What the**

Law could not do, God did (Rom. 8: 3) through the sacrifice of his son and the giving of the Spirit. The law in hands of sinners fails, but the same law (**Love your neighbor as yourself**—v. 14) in the capable hands of the Spirit produces the obedience required. Evangelical obedience is not the mechanical production of human effort but the organic produce (**fruit**) of a life which has been fundamentally changed by the Spirit. It is not the legal obedience of a slave who grinds his teeth and does what he is told, but the obedience of a child who loves his father and experiences the **joy** (the second fruit of the Spirit listed) of pleasing his father.

Evangelical obedience consists in **love** which **does not rejoice in unrighteousness but rejoices with the truth** (1 Cor. 13: 6). That is, it is not like the self-righteousness of the Pharisees who lorded it over the masses with no concern for their lost condition.

Gordon Fee has drawn attention to the intensely communal emphasis of the fruit of the Spirit in *Galatians*, many of which pertain to relationships within the body of Christ (p. 425). The fruit of the Spirit will guard against **enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, envying** (vv. 20b-21a), while a legal spirit of law-keeping will produce such behavior (5: 15). Constraining the deeds of the flesh within the corporate community is especially important given the corporate nature of sanctification in which we are all dependent upon one another for our growth into a mature Christian.

And He gave some *as* apostles, and some *as* prophets, and some *as* evangelists, and some *as* pastors and teachers,¹² for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, **to the building up of the body of Christ;**¹³ until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ.¹⁴ As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming;¹⁵ but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all *aspects* into Him who is the head, *even* Christ,¹⁶ **from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love.** (Eph. 4:11-16 NASB)

Notice the word **man** in the singular which is appropriate to Paul's metaphor of the **body** of Christ, not "bodies" of Christ.

Outward obedience to the law might be attainable—at least Paul once viewed himself this way (Phil. 3: 4-6)—but when we understand the radical internal demands of the law (Rom. 7: 9-10), we know that they are completely out of reach apart from the Spirit's work in us.

But sin, taking opportunity through the commandment, produced in me coveting of every kind; for apart from the Law sin *is* dead.⁹ I was once alive apart from the Law; but when the commandment came, sin became alive and I died;¹⁰ and this commandment, which was to result in life, proved to result in death for me; (Rom. 7:8-10 NASB)

c. The Agents of Sanctification—The Holy Spirit and the Believer

Krabbendam emphasizes that progressive sanctification is 100 % God and 100 % man. Add those figures together and you still get 100% (100 % + 100 % = 100 %). The divine work of the Spirit is primary, but the work of man is not unnecessary. God is working (cf. also Phil 1: 6) and the

believer is working at the same time (*Christian Doctrine*, p. 142). The clearest expression of this equation is found in Phil. 2.

So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your salvation with fear and trembling;¹³ for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for *His* good pleasure. (Phil. 2:12-13 NASB)

John Murray points out that the salvation referred to in these verses is not the salvation we already possess but the “eschatological” salvation we will one day experience, the “hope” of salvation expressed in 1 Thess. 5: 8. Explaining the relationship between our participation and God’s he says,

God’s working in us is not suspended [interrupted] because we work, nor our working suspended because God works. Neither is the relation strictly one of co-operation as if God did his part and we did ours so that the conjunction or coordination of both produced the required result. God works in us and we also work. But the relation is that *because* God works we work. All working out of salvation on our part is the effect of God’s working in us, not the willing to the exclusion of the doing and not the doing to the exclusion of the willing, but both the willing and the doing. All this working of God is directed to the end of enabling us to will and to do that which is well-pleasing to him. We have here not only the explanation of all acceptable activity on our part but we have also the incentive to our willing and working. What the apostle is urging is the necessity of working out our own salvation, and the encouragement he supplies is the assurance that it is God himself who works in us. The more persistently active we are in working, the more persuaded we may be that all the energizing grace and power is of God (John Murray, *Redemption Accomplished and Applied*, pp. 148-149).

The Holy Spirit works in us, but he does not work without us. Christians are not instructed to passively “let go and let God” do his work in us, but to **walk by the Spirit**, an activity of the believer living in conscious awareness of his dependence upon the Spirit’s power and help. Even those passages in which the passive voice (**led**, *ago*) is used do not imply the inactivity of the believer: **For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God** (Rom. 8: 14). “But if you are **led** by the Spirit, you are not under the Law” (Gal. 5: 18). Being led by the Spirit is not passivity.

Paul’s meaning is not that we should do nothing till celestial promptings pop into our minds, but that we should resolutely labor by prayer and effort to obey the law of Christ and mortify sin....

The Christian’s motto should not be “Let go and let God” but “Trust God and get going!” So if, for instance, you are fighting a bad habit, work out before God a strategy for ensuring that you will not fall victim to it again, ask him to bless your plan; and go out in his strength, ready to say no next time the temptation comes. Or if you are seeking to form a good habit, work out a strategy in the same way, ask God’s help, and then try your hardest (J.I. Packer, *Keep in Step With the Spirit*, pp. 156-157).

Without the enabling of the Holy Spirit, our efforts to be holy are futile, but an unwillingness to avail ourselves of the means of grace (the word, prayer, fellowship) indicates a misunderstanding of the Spirit’s method of sanctification. As Murray reminds us, “Sanctification is the sanctification of persons, and persons are not machines...” (p. 150). Robots can be created on an assembly line and programmed to perform according to specified instructions, but people cannot—if they are to remain people. Furthermore, God’s goal in our obedience is not simple performance of the required action—as indicated above—but the acquisition of **love** toward God and man which is the motive

behind the action. Only people can obey God because they love him; robots cannot. Progressive sanctification is therefore, progressive because people do not change quickly.

(1) The necessity of the Holy Spirit

As justification is by grace, so it is with sanctification. We never grow past grace, but only deeper into the realization and understanding of grace. Left to ourselves we would be helpless in the face of Satan's relentless temptation and our own remaining corruption.

The regenerate man who delights in the law of God, cannot perform the deeds of the law in his own strength. To try that leads inevitably and by definition to his being sold under sin—note the passive!—because of the power of what Paul designates as indwelling sin (v. 20)! The enemy inside (indwelling sin, or the flesh [v. 25]) plus the enemy outside (temptations) are always and by definition stronger than the new heart of the regenerate man. As long as he is by himself and on his own he will always be victimized by (sold under!) sin, and he will do what he does not want to do. Sanctification on the part of the Christian by himself and on his own, depending upon his own strength, is an absolute and total impossibility. Indwelling sin, or the flesh, is too powerful (Henry Krabbendam, *Christian Doctrine*, p. 141, emphasis mine).

For this reason, we must rely on the strength which only the Spirit can provide to resist the power of indwelling sin within and temptations without (outside the believer). Nor can we ever hope to reach a resting place or plateau of sanctified obedience which immunizes us against the danger of drifting back into self-dependence and neglect of the Spirit. There is always the danger of departing from dependence upon the Spirit and believing that we have finally arrived at a place of personal strength. As Krabbendam points out in Rom. 7, Paul's joyful cry, **Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!** is followed by the realistic, **So then, on the one hand I myself with my mind am serving the law of God, but on the other, with my flesh the law of sin.** Thus, the transition from Rom. 7 to Rom. 8 is never complete this side of heaven, and the Christian cannot graduate from the one to the other until death. We will never in this life be able to leave Rom. 7 behind, as much as the Keswick movement (a perfectionist movement) would like to believe (*Christian Doctrine*, pp. 141-142).

But recognition of dependence is not defeatism, but true victory for the Christian who understands that all self-effort in sanctification is futile. It is a freedom akin to justification in which he is freed from all futile self-effort to make himself right with God. As the man justified by faith is free to obey out of love without fear of damnation, so now the man being sanctified by faith is freed from the vanity of trying to keep the law unsuccessfully through self-effort. He will still feel the pinch of his helplessness when he sins: **Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death?** But the answer to this wretchedness will come to him again and again, **Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!** (Krabbendam, p. 141). **There is therefore now no condemnation,** Paul says, **for those who are in Christ Jesus** (8: 1)—a condemnation which applies not only to those who are not delivered from the guilt of sin but also not delivered from its power (Murray, *Romans*, pp. 274-275). A full salvation includes both deliverance from sin's guilt and from its power, and anyone still living under its power is, therefore, still under condemnation. But this cannot be true for believers who are given the enabling power of the Spirit **in order that the requirement of the Law might be fulfilled in us** (8: 4). This is certainly not defeatism but confident assurance for consistent victory over sin—although not perfect victory.

(2) The Necessity of the Means of Grace

The Spirit does not work in a vacuum but through means, what theologians call the means of grace. Generally, they are (1) the word of God, (2) prayer, (3) fellowship with believers, (4) participation in the Lord's Supper. The believer must use these means consistently to grow in sanctification.

(a) The Word

The Apostle Peter says, **like newborn babes, long for the pure milk of the word, that by it you may grow in respect to salvation** (1 Pet. 2: 2). As a father of four children, I have often observed young infants nursing at their mother's breasts. When Fran had not deferred to their appetite according to expectations, their tender crying became mixed with what I would characterize as a bit of accusing anger as if to say, "Well, where's the milk?!" After grabbing hold of the nipple, their sucking began in such earnest (heard all the way into the next room) that one would think they were literally on the brink of starvation; and of course, in their minds they were. Such is the figure Peter is giving us here for all Christians, not just new-born Christians. It is not the figure of Paul in 1 Cor. 3: 2 or Heb. 5: 12 of elementary teaching which is only suitable for immature Christians.

I gave you milk to drink, not solid food; for you were not yet able *to receive it*. Indeed, even now you are not yet able, (1 Cor. 3:2 NASB)

For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you have need again for someone to teach you the elementary principles of the oracles of God, and you have come to need milk and not solid food. (Heb. 5:12 NASB)

The figure he is presenting is one to be imitated by all Christians, mature and immature alike. Like a baby desiring his mother's milk we should desire the word of God, and this desire should not subside when we supposedly reach "maturity". In comparison to the knowledge of God, our knowledge will always be immature especially while in the flesh and even after we enter the future age.

By the word we grow spiritually and rationally in respect to salvation. The word for **pure** or **spiritual** is *logikos* in the Greek text, the same word Paul uses in Rom. 12: 1, **I urge you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual [or rational—*logikos*] service of worship.** The word of God is rational milk which changes our whole way of thinking about life. It has been said by many that a person is what he reads. This is a true statement even when we are talking about books which are merely human works. When we continually fill our minds with good books, our minds improve accordingly as we digest and reflect upon what we read. Likewise, if we fill our minds with books of poor quality, or books with filth, our thinking is degraded by the content of such books. The saying is true, "If you don't want to get dirty, don't play with pigs." The truth of this principle is precisely why Paul says,

Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, dwell on these things. (Phil. 4:8 NASB)

If our minds are shaped even by the reading of human books, how much more so are they shaped by the reading of the Bible? This is not a guarantee that one who studies the Bible will be saved, for there are many scholars who know the Bible well who are not Christians. But for the one who submits to its authority and desires to be changed by it and for one who is dependent upon the power of the Spirit, he will most definitely **grow in respect to salvation**. He will learn more about his Savior, more of his moral perfection and how to be like him, more about the body of Christ which he created, and more about why Christ came into the world to save sinners; namely, to restore the universe to the divine intention and purity God had in mind when he created the world in the first place.

Any efforts at progressive sanctification apart from the study and meditation upon the word of God are doomed to failure. It is true that we possess the Holy Spirit and that he works in us (Phil. 2: 12-13), but the Holy Spirit is the same Spirit who inspired the word of God in the old and new testaments. We should not expect any moral transformation by the Holy Spirit when we continually grieve him by ignoring his word. Do we presume him to honor us with direct revelation (“God told me.”) when we dishonor him by hindering the illumination of the Spirit through the word given for 2000 years? As Packer has noted, being led by the Spirit (Rom. 8: 14) is

not a revealing to the mind of divine directives hitherto unknown; it is, rather, an impelling of our wills to pursue and practice and hold fast that sanctity whose terms we know already (*Keeping in Step with the Spirit*, p. 118).

Thus, being **led** by the Spirit is simply being obedient to the Spirit’s will already revealed to us in Scripture. Peter puts the matter very simply: a baby grows by milk, without which he will not grow. A Christian grows by his dependence upon the word, without which he will not grow “spiritually” or “rationally”. As Murray observes, “Sanctification is the sanctification of persons, and persons are not machines”; thus, the person must be actively involved in the progress of his own growth in grace. The reading and study of the word of God is an indispensable part of this process; and sadly, too many Christians remain babies in their thinking and their behavior because of this neglect.

But we must not limit dependence upon the word to the private activity of personal Bible study. God so designed the church that some members are given special gifts of interpreting and teaching the word (Eph. 4: 11-12). Although every Christian must read the Bible and attempt to understand it for himself, this duty does not imply that every Christian has the same capability in this endeavor. Pastor-teachers are given to the church to help God’s people understand and apply the word so that the whole church collectively and corporately can grow up into a new, mature man in Christ (Eph. 4: 13-14). Neglect of the public ministry of the word in preaching and teaching is not only a violation of the command not to neglect **assembling together** (Heb. 10: 24-25), but the sin of arrogance. It claims that our ability to interpret and apply the Scripture has no need of improvement or additional guidance from others; in short, it claims that we have all the knowledge we need. It is also arrogant to claim that modern preaching and teaching cannot be improved and informed by over 400 years of historical scholarship from the Protestant Reformation until today. Since the invention of the printing press, the church has been blessed with the added benefit of pastor-teachers who are now in heaven but whose works continue to live on earth. Neglect of such teaching is the neglect of the Spirit’s work in ages past.

(b) Prayer

Prayer is the admission of human helplessness against the remaining power of indwelling sin: (Rom. 7: 24). This is not the cry of an unregenerate man or an immature Christian, but the Apostle Paul who knew the struggles of attempting to please God in his own strength (see discussion above). **Wretched man** is not the cry of an unregenerate man or an immature Christian, but the Apostle Paul who knew the struggles of remaining sin.

**Did we in our own strength confide,
our striving would be losing,
were not the right Man on our side,
the Man of God's own choosing.**

Apart from me, Jesus said, **you can do nothing** (Jn. 15: 5). This is the testimony of the timid disciples who ran like rabbits the night Jesus was betrayed, but who preached boldly on the Day of Pentecost when the Spirit of Christ was poured out.

Yet, the work of the Spirit producing boldness was not automatically forthcoming from the Day of Pentecost onward, for the same Peter who proclaimed fearlessly to the Sanhedrin that he must obey God rather than man (Acts 4: 19) was the same timid soul who feared the party of the circumcision in Antioch (Gal. 2: 11-14). The Paul who wrote Rom. 8 is the same who wrote Rom. 7. He is the same Paul who was able to speak the word causing Elymas the magician to go blind (Acts 13), but who later entered into an argument with Barnabas about Mark, an argument which Luke describes as a **sharp disagreement**.

Possessing the Holy Spirit is not the same as being **filled** with the Holy Spirit. If we are Christians, we receive the Holy Spirit upon regeneration, and if we do not have the Spirit, we are not believers (Rom. 8: 9). We are never commanded on a daily basis to receive the Holy Spirit, for He never leaves us (Jn. 14: 16); but we are commanded to **be filled** with the Holy Spirit.

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

According to the context of the verse, to be filled with the Spirit is to be controlled by the Spirit. If a man is drunk with wine, he is under its controlling influence. Likewise, if one is filled with the Spirit, he is under the Spirit's controlling influence. He cannot be controlled by both wine and the Holy Spirit at the same time. This filling of the Spirit enables him to **walk by the Spirit** and **not carry out the desire of the flesh** (Gal. 5: 16). What will this look like? **The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control** (Gal. 5: 22-23a). If we are **walking** by the Spirit, the **deeds of the flesh** (vv. 19-21) will not be manifest in our lives.

There is no permanent deliverance from **Wretched man that I am!** to complete victory in the here and now. The Christian will never be free from the experience of Rom. 7, and any claim to that effect will bring disillusionment to himself and dangerous misguidance of others (cf. J.I. Packer's comments on the errors of Keswick theology in *Keeping in Step with the Spirit*, pp. 150-163). Consequently, daily dependence upon the filling of the Spirit is necessary to help us apply the truth claims of Scripture to practical situations of daily living. Living the Christian life is not just difficult; it is impossible. Just read the Sermon on the Mount with Jesus' constant emphasis upon heart obedience, and you will see what I mean. The natural man is incapable of living such a life, and so is the Christian who believes that simply knowing what to do will ensure the doing of it

(Rom. 7). We cannot live this supernatural existence without constant requests for supernatural help. **Pray without ceasing** Paul commands us (1 Thess. 5: 17), and we should not wonder why Paul commands us to do so! **With all prayer and petition pray at all times in the Spirit...** (Eph. 6: 18a), a command given within the context of deadly spiritual warfare **against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places** (Eph. 6: 12).

(c) Fellowship with other Believers

Particularly in the West, Christians have often forgotten (if they ever knew to begin with) that their spiritual growth is dependent upon others. From Eph. 4: 11-16, we learn that Christians must grow into a mature “man” (singular) through the equipping gifts of others. But our dependence on others does not end here. We are dependent upon other believers who are not pastors or teachers for a variety of Christian graces which God providentially distributes to us through their spiritual gifts. The author of Hebrews recognized the importance of public worship as an opportunity for mutual stimulation to good works and for encouragement.

and let us consider **how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds**,²⁵ not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging *one another*; and all the more as you see the day drawing near. (Heb. 10:24-25 NASB)

Perhaps no other passage in the Bible demonstrates our dependence upon one another more than 1 Cor. 12, Paul’s use of the physical body as a metaphor for the church.

Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit.⁵ And there are varieties of ministries, and the same Lord.⁶ There are varieties of effects, but the same God who works all things in all *persons*.⁷ But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.⁸ For to one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit, and to another the word of knowledge according to the same Spirit;⁹ to another faith by the same Spirit, and to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit,¹⁰ and to another the effecting of miracles, and to another prophecy, and to another the distinguishing of spirits, to another *various* kinds of tongues, and to another the interpretation of tongues.¹¹ But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually just as He wills.¹² For even as the body is one and *yet* has many members, and all the members of the body, though they are many, are one body, so also is Christ.¹³ For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.¹⁴ For the body is not one member, but many.¹⁵ If the foot says, "Because I am not a hand, I am not *a part* of the body," it is not for this reason any the less *a part* of the body.¹⁶ And if the ear says, "Because I am not an eye, I am not *a part* of the body," it is not for this reason any the less *a part* of the body.¹⁷ If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole were hearing, where would the sense of smell be?¹⁸ But now God has placed the members, each one of them, in the body, just as He desired.¹⁹ If they were all one member, where would the body be?²⁰ But now there are many members, but one body.²¹ And the eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you"; or again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you."²² On the contrary, it is much truer that the members of the body which seem to be weaker are necessary;²³ and those *members* of the body which we deem less honorable, on these we bestow more abundant honor, and our less presentable members become much more presentable,²⁴ whereas our more presentable members have no need *of it*. But God has so composed the body, giving more abundant honor to that *member* which lacked,²⁵ so that there may be no division in the body, but *that* the members may have the same care for one another.²⁶ And

if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; if *one* member is honored, all the members rejoice with it.²⁷ Now you are Christ's body, and individually members of it. (1 Cor. 12:4-27 NASB)

The physical body, which is one, has many parts which serve different functions for the well-being of the whole body. Conversely, the whole body is coordinated to benefit each particular member of the body. The body of Christ is like the human body—many parts and functions but all part of one unified whole. Each member and each gift serve the benefit of the whole body, and the whole body serves each individual member. One member is not more important than the whole body and therefore should not flaunt itself, and the whole body is not more important than each particular member; and therefore, should not swallow up or discount the individual contribution of one member. In this way, the body of Christ does not become the victim of individuality or individual gifts. It is not dominated by a few people. Conversely, the individual is not swallowed up by the pressing concerns of the whole body and lost among the multitude.

The conclusion of the whole argument is this: (a) Each of us is necessary for the well-being of all of us—the whole body; and (b) all of us—the whole body—is necessary for the well-being of each of us. Therefore, the body functions as a unit, or it doesn't function at all.

(a) Each one of us is necessary for the well-being of all of us—the whole body.

I want us to notice, first, how Paul directs his attention to two groups of people within the church—to those who thought too highly of themselves and to those who thought too little of themselves. I'll deal with the second group first. In v. 15, he says that the foot should not think too lowly of itself for not being a hand. As a foot, it is still part of the body. Now it very well could be that the function of a hand may be more useful overall than the function of a foot, but the foot is not for this reason any less a part of the body which would be seriously handicapped without the foot. The same could be said for the ear. The loss an eye would be considered more debilitating to most of us than the loss of an ear, but this does not make the ear any less a part of the whole body, and none of us would be indifferent if one of our ears were cut off or if we lost the hearing in one ear. As a matter of fact, there are many who would say that the loss of hearing in both ears would be far more fearful than total blindness simply because of the loss of communication with others.

Certainly, none of us wants to be one big eyeball (v. 17) for then we couldn't hear or smell or anything else, but only see. Or what if the body were one huge ear? What good would that do us? A fingernail is not thought to be that significant, and certainly we can live without one fingernail but all of us value our fingernails. Just try to pick a penny off the floor without them, or accidentally detach a fingernail, then all of a sudden, we realize how important it is. Jesus said the very hairs of our head are numbered (Matt. 10: 30). My hair was far more useful to me than I previously imagined. Now I have to wear a cap whenever I go outside—it's either too sunny or too cold.

Sovereignly God has put the human body together in a certain way to make it a unified whole capable of many different functions. It can run, walk, think, digest, see, hear, talk—all kinds of useful things. There are important functions going on internally which we are not conscious of. Our hearts are pumping, red blood cells are taking oxygen and nutrients to different parts of the body, the liver is detoxifying our blood, and the digestive tract is breaking down the food we ate and making it usable for the body. But I'm not consciously thankful for these functions on a day to day basis.

Most of the time we are not conscious of any internal organ or function or the contributions they make to our well-being unless something goes wrong. Then we know that our body is not operating properly—chest pain, nausea, severe stomach pain, headache, whatever the symptoms might be. Then we begin to appreciate the time when we felt good, the time when we took the proper functioning of the body for granted. If any of the parts are missing or not functioning, the body is unhealthy, in pain, handicapped, or may be dying. The body of Christ is the same way. We need all the parts functioning or else we are not operating at 100%, and if a large portion of the parts are not functioning or if an important organ is not functioning, we may be seriously ill.

The only difference between the church and the human body in this analogy is that we have often developed so much artificial machinery for the church that it can be seriously diseased, or even dead, and we don't even know it. We may have Sunday services, but the community of common life is lacking.

Notice in v.18 that God has put the body of Christ together in a certain way **just as He desired**. God didn't ask us how He should make the human body, and He didn't ask us how He should put the church together either. We can't improve on the design; we just need to recognize the wisdom of the design, appreciate it, and use it to its fullest potential. Were it not for the diversity of the whole body with each person making his or her contribution, the church would be one big monstrosity incapable of performing the many functions of a healthy body. The church can be handicapped, unhealthy, in pain, or at worst, it can die. We may not be conscious of the individual contributions; we may not even be self-conscious of our own contributions—which, to a degree, can be a healthy thing in that we don't need to be too self-conscious—but they are important whether we recognize their importance or not.

Everyone knows that a church cannot function properly without teaching and preaching gifts. But what if the teaching and preaching are not being applied by the congregation on a day to day basis? That negates the benefit of preaching, doesn't it? Where would the church be without special acts of service (Rom. 12: 7), charity, mercy, and administration (organization)—all of which are listed as gifts of the Spirit. Service is a broad term which can include all the spiritual gifts. The church cannot thrive without everyone making his or her contribution or service to the body?

It is obvious from the text in 1 Cor. that some of the people were not convinced of their importance to the body (vv. 15-16). Only the flashy gifts, such as the gift of tongues, were receiving much attention, and sometimes they were not being used properly (1 Cor. 14). I sometimes wonder whether we subconsciously discard many gifts to the unused clothing bin—the ordinary gifts of serving, helping, administration, mercy, etc. It seems apparent from the text that these ordinary gifts are the ones Paul is emphasizing because those who had the gift of tongues had no trouble recognizing the significance of their gifts. Today, pastors have no trouble understanding the importance of their gifts of teaching, but they may be discounting the contributions of others in their congregation.

This inattention to diversity on our part may be the result of Western theological tradition. The Reformers brought to our attention the three marks of a true church—the true preaching of the word, the proper administration of the sacraments, and the proper administration of discipline. All these are necessary, but they are not enough.

Jesus didn't say very much about the Lord's Supper, baptism, or church discipline, but He did talk a lot about love manifested in the corporate life of a congregation. **“By this”,** Jesus said, **“all men will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another”** (Jn. 13: 35). But how do we show love? I would suggest that the ordinary spiritual gifts of a congregation are the primary arteries through which this love is circulated to the body of Christ—serving, giving sacrificially, special administrations of mercy, teaching, encouragement, even loving exhortation and rebuke when necessary. We show love by getting involved in other peoples' lives.

We will probably not know until Christ returns how necessary we all are no matter how small and unimportant we think we are—the housewife with three small children who still finds time to take meals to sick people; the carpenter who repairs the destitute widow's house at no charge; the old man or woman who prays constantly for the rest of the congregation; the administrator who keeps helps the church use funds wisely; the wise counselor who studies her Bible and wisely analyzes people's personal problems, and knows just what to say at the right time. All these are unseen, uncelebrated, and for the most part, thankless, people who make life livable in the church for all of us.

Based on this passage, just because you are not an arm, you are not thereby any less a part of the body. God sees your work and knows the cheerfulness of your heart in the exercise of your spiritual gifts even if you don't recognize them as such. Your labor is not in vain in the Lord, and the church would not be what it is without you. If you are hanging back and not consciously using your gift because you think it is insignificant, the church will not be what it could be or should be. There are no “little people” in the church of Jesus Christ. Each one of us is necessary for the well-being of all of us—the whole body.

(b) All of us—the whole body—is also necessary for the well-being of each of us (vv. 21-26)

Just as you can't claim to be unnecessary, no one else can claim that you are unnecessary to their well-being. This is the second group of people in the Corinthian church who had an inflated view of their own importance. Many pastors fit into this category simply by overestimating their own importance. Some Christians presume themselves to be spiritually self-sufficient, but Paul says they're not. The Christian life was never meant to be lived in isolation from one another.

Notice, Paul didn't say they were weak, but that they “seemed” weaker. Consider the heart, lungs, and other parts of our body which are necessary, yet not strong enough to exist on the outside of the body. They require the protection of the ribcage, muscles, and skin to survive. The analogy makes me think of the elderly in the church, as only one example, who are so often the ones who pray more and give more sacrificially than anyone else. They “appear” weak to some perhaps because of age or sickness, or they may be people who are not fond of a lot of attention. They are the shy ones who work behind the scenes in ways most people are not aware of. They are not weak; they just appear to be weak to some people.

Then, in v. 23, Paul uses an interesting analogy concerning those parts of the body which we consider “unseemly” or less honorable. Another translation of the word “unseemly” is “less presentable” which helps with the interpretation. What are those unseemly or less presentable parts of the human body which Paul is talking about? I think he is talking about the sexual organs, or perhaps the buttocks, or a woman's breasts. Those are the parts of our bodies which we deem unrepresentable to the public eye. What do we do with these parts of our bodies? I don't mean to

be funny in what I am about to say, much less do I intend to be crude; but do we cut them off because they are less presentable? Not hardly. Rather, we “bestow more abundant honor” on these unpresentable parts by covering them up and protecting them. *By covering their shame, we make them presentable to others.*

What does Paul mean? Here’s what I think he means. There are members of the congregation who not only *appear* to be spiritually weak, but they *are* spiritually weak, and their dishonor and shame become fully exposed through their spiritual weakness. We could think of many examples: couples who are having trouble in their marriages, individual members who may have fallen into sexual immorality or drugs, those who are having financial problems due to mismanagement, emotional instability, or even laziness. We can think of quirky people in the church who have trouble interacting socially with others. We can think of all kinds of scenarios and all kinds of people who fit into this category. I am not talking about those who are wayward and unrepentant and defiant of authority. Paul deals with those in 1 Cor. 5. When all else fails, those people have to be excommunicated from the church. But Paul is not talking about such people in 1 Cor. 12.

What we are talking about here are troubled Christians (or even troublesome Christians) who need, and are submissive to, special help. What do we do with these people? Do we cut them off and go on with the business of the church? After all, we have a kingdom to build, don’t we? Do we quietly ignore them and hope they go away so we can clean up the church and show our best side to the community? I mean, really, how could they be necessary for the body? Don’t they just give the church a bad reputation?

But Paul says they *are* necessary. And because they are necessary, the whole body is designed *to cover their shame by caring for them and restoring them to spiritual health* (v. 25). And this may be a long and arduous process in which we see only faint and minimal results. Our care for such members accomplishes two purposes, one of which is explicitly mentioned in the text and one which isn’t. *First*, “that there should be no division in the body” (v. 25). What kind of division is Paul talking about? Well, the letter to the Corinthians starts out with Paul addressing the divisions in the Corinthian church—divisions concerning leadership, divisions concerning immorality, lawsuits between Christians, marriage problems, improper use of liberty and the Lord’s Supper.

It seemed as if the Corinthian church could divide about almost anything, including spiritual gifts. But as the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of unity, so are the gifts administered by the Spirit. They are not meant to divide the body by each member exalting himself or by excluding troublesome members, but they are meant to unify the body through the care each member receives from the others, *especially those members who need special help*. Just think of the spiritual gifts as the conduits (pipelines or arteries) of love for the body of Christ—each gift contributing whatever it can to care for those in need, like red blood cells caring oxygen and nutrients to the various cells. This is the activity which makes the church look beautiful. Where else in the world do we see the weak and lonely, the strange and sinful, being cared for, loved and accepted like they are cared for in the body of Christ? And isn’t it a shame and disgrace when the body isn’t functioning in this way?

And this brings me to the *second*, less explicit, purpose of covering the shame and caring for erring members. Far from discrediting the church in the public eye by having weak people in the church, having such members who are being cared for is the *ultimate testimony of the gospel—that Jesus came to save that which was lost, that He came to rescue the weak, that he came to heal the sick,*

not those who were well. I'm reminded of the Christians in ancient Rome who waited under the aqueducts for the Roman citizens to abandon their new-born daughters or deformed new-born sons to the dogs. They would rescue them and take them into their own families to nurture as their own children. These abandoned children were the throw-aways of society, rejected even by their own families. Yet, they were precious in the sight of God's people.

The body of Christ is an orchestra playing a symphony, not a cacophony of noise in no particular arrangement. And when one of the musicians squeaks out the wrong note, the whole orchestra doesn't stop the music and kick the musician off the stage in disgust; it continues playing to cover up the aberrant note. Again I am not discounting the need for the extremes of church discipline, but church discipline begins long before excommunication. And before discipline is negative, it is positive—including teaching, admonishing, nurturing, and gently correcting.

And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it. The suffering mentioned here could refer to a wide variety of suffering including physical and emotional suffering which we all experience, but I believe the suffering brought on by personal sin and spiritual weakness especially fits the context of the passage. When any member suffers even because of personal sin in his life, all the members suffer, and when he is restored to honor, it is cause for rejoicing in the whole church because that member, who was dysfunctional, is now restored to his proper function in the body.

Jesus said that the distinguishing mark of his disciples would be the love they showed to one another (Jn. 13: 35). According to the disciple whom Jesus loved (Jn. 21: 7—John), love which is not demonstrated is a nice theory but not true love (1 Jn. 3: 18), for he said in the previous verse, **But whoever has the world's goods, and beholds his brother in need and closes his heart against him, how does the love of God abide in him?** (v. 17) He had the right to say this because the love of God is not merely a theory, but love in action, **For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life** (Jn. 3: 16).

The church in which all of its members are nurtured by others with the love of Christ is a church where progressive sanctification is taking place. It may not even have the best teachers, but the practice of the basic truth of the gospel is being lived out before all its members. This living gospel cannot help but elevate the thoughts and hearts of anyone associated with its membership. Without this love, knowledge is powerless (1 Cor. 13: 2).

(d) Participation in the Lord's Supper

This is actually a form of fellowship within the body, but it is also fellowship with the Lord himself, for the Lord's Supper is the antitype of the Passover. In that first Passover, the angel of death passed over the Israelites when he noticed the blood of the lamb applied to the doorposts and lintels of the Israelite's houses. The Egyptians, on the other hand, suffered the loss of their first-born son when the angel came by. Thus, the Passover was a sign that God was at peace with his people while he was at war with Egypt. In the Lord's Supper, Christ dines with his people. It was not characteristic of his culture to eat with someone who was your enemy. By eating with us at the Lord's table, Christ declares his peace with us and His acceptance of us; thus, it is a means of grace. Regular participation in the Lord's Supper is healthy because we are reminded in a tangible

(appealing to the sensations of the body) way that God loves us through his son Jesus Christ (Lk. 22: 19; Matt. 26: 27-28).

G. Perseverance and Preservation

The subject of perseverance is a coin with two sides. On the one side is the perseverance of the saints which consists of the activity of the believer. It is the believer who perseveres in his faith. On the opposite side of the same coin is the eternal security of the believer, or what most theologians call the preservation of the saints which consists of the activity of God in behalf of the saints. It is God who preserves his people. The two concepts work together and are mutually supportive of one another as we have already seen in Phil. 2: 12-13. The work of the believer is not suspended (caused to cease) because of the work of God within him, nor is God's work suspended with the efforts of the believer in availing himself of the means of grace (Bible reading, prayer, fellowship; cf. discussion above). The believer's diligence in the means of grace is predicated upon (based upon) the fact of the Spirit's work in him without which he would not exercise due diligence. This relationship between the believer's perseverance and God's preservation is given further explanation below.

1. The Believer's Responsibility—Perseverance

The *Westminster Confession of Faith* defines perseverance as follows: "They whom God hath accepted in his Beloved, effectually called and sanctified by his Spirit, can neither totally nor finally fall away from the state of grace; but shall certainly persevere therein to the end, and be eternally saved." There is strong resistance to this doctrine arising from various texts of Scripture and also the actual experience of people who once gave convincing evidence of belief but who have fallen away from the faith (cf. John Murray, *Redemption Accomplished and Applied*, "Perseverance").

On the Scripture side of the argument some of the passages that come to mind are Heb. 6: 4-6; 2 Pet. 2: 1, 20-22; Matt. 24: 13; 13: 20-21; 7: 22-23; Jn. 15: 1, 2, 6; and 2 Tim. 4: 10a, to name only a few. How are we to reconcile these verses with the belief that all those who are saved will certainly persevere to the end? Much of the confusion arises from the notion that all who sincerely profess faith in Christ and confirm this faith with credible obedience for a reasonable period of time are actually believers. This is an honest mistake given the descriptions of such people in Heb. 6 and Matt. 13—people who **have been made partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God...**, or one **who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy**. All of us know such people, and we have watched them embrace the Christian faith with joy, grow in their knowledge of Scripture, enjoy fellowship with other believers, reform their lifestyles, etc. only to renounce their faith months or years later and fall back into their old patterns of disobedience. Murray comments on this remarkable and frightening reality.

This emphasis in Scripture [namely, endurance to the end—my note] should teach us two things. (1) It provides us with the meaning of falling away, of apostasy. It is possible to give all the outward signs of faith in Christ and obedience to him, to witness for a time a good confession and show great zeal for Christ and his kingdom and then lose all interest and become indifferent, if not hostile, to the claims of Christ and his kingdom....(2) We must appreciate the lengths and the heights to which a temporary faith may carry those who have it....In terms of the similitude [the parable of the sower]

there was the blade and sometimes there may be the ear. There is not only germination; there is also growth. The only defect is that there is never the full corn in the ear. (*Redemption*, pp. 152-153)

It would appear simpler just to admit that such people had lost their salvation. But the fact remains that our Lord is the one who must define for us the characteristics of genuine faith. And what kind of faith is it? It is a faith that “endures”, not for some arbitrary period of time set by theologians or church courts, but “to the end” (Mk. 13: 13).

It is at this point that perseverance must be clearly distinguished from the “eternal security of the believer”, a doctrine which often obscures his responsibility and marginalizes (sets aside) his activity in “working *out* [not *for*] his own salvation”. This doctrine is often articulated as a confidence in salvation enjoyed without respect to faith and obedience. After all, the new covenant is a covenant of grace founded upon the Abrahamic covenant in which Abraham “believed in the Lord; and He reckoned it [his faith] to him as righteousness” (Gen. 15: 6). It is quite true that the Abrahamic covenant is foundationally an unconditional covenant ratified on the basis of God’s promise of due performance of the covenant requirements as he symbolically walked between the pieces of slain animals (Gen. 15). The Trinitarian God alone would secure the performance of this covenant through the atoning work of Christ who proclaimed from the cross that everything necessary to its fulfillment had been done—“**It is finished.**”

On the other hand, none of this implies that persistent (continuous) repentance and faith are set aside as the necessary conditions of appropriating (taking possession of) this covenant. Abraham **believed**, but the Bible never says “he quit believing”. He kept on believing God, not once, twice, or three times, but continually; and his faith (persistent faith) was reckoned (and continued to be reckoned) as righteousness. Faith is not a meritorious work deserving of righteousness but faith in a meritorious work, the work of Christ; but to be genuine faith it must be a faith that perseveres to the very end of a person’s life. This much the Bible makes clear: **but Christ was faithful as a Son over His house whose house we are, if we hold fast our confidence and the boast of our hope firm until the end** (Heb. 3: 6). The **if** makes our position as believers conditional upon faith, the kind of faith which does not ultimately fail the test. This does not imply that we will never have occasional doubts nor that we may for an extended period of time waver in our faith, but it does mean that through difficult times of doubt and trial, we will hold fast the faith we formerly professed.

Furthermore, a persistent **faith** must not be separated from a persistent life of good works. **Faith without works is dead** (James 2: 17), and there is no reason to assume that a person is persevering in faith if he is not also persevering in good works and the manifestation of the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5: 22-23). Faith in Christ includes love for Christ which demonstrates its genuineness in keeping his commandments (Jn. 14: 15) including love for others, peace with others, patience with others, kindness toward others, and self-control amid tempting situations. For this reason, **holding fast our confidence firmly to the end** cannot be disengaged from the **sanctification without which no one will see the Lord** (12: 14). The author of this verse is not speaking of definitive sanctification which is the once-for-all act of God upon the believer, but a sanctification which we must **pursue** actively by faith. It is for this reason that reformed theologians like Murray shy away from the designation: “The Security of the Believer”. As we shall see shortly, the true believer is most definitely secure, but he is not secure apart from the persistent repentance and faith which inevitably lead to obedience. As Murray insists,

It is not true that a believer is secure however much he may fall into sin and unfaithfulness. Why is this not true? It is not true because it sets up an impossible combination. It is true that a believer sins; he may fall into grievous sin and backslide for lengthy periods. But it is also true that a believer cannot abandon himself to sin; he cannot come under the dominion of sin; he cannot be guilty of certain kinds of unfaithfulness [e.g. 1 Jn. 5: 16-17; Mk. 3: 29]. And therefore it is utterly wrong to say that a believer is secure quite irrespective of his subsequent life of sin and unfaithfulness. The truth is that the faith of Jesus Christ is always respective of the life of holiness and fidelity. And so it is never proper to think of a believer irrespective of the fruits in faith and holiness (*Redemption Accomplished and Applied*, p. 154).

This is the clear teaching of the Apostle Paul who, after triumphantly proclaiming, **There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus** (Rom. 8: 1), also follows with, “So then, brethren, we are under obligation, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh—for if you are living according to the flesh, you must die; but if by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live. For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God” (8: 12-14). Therefore, the status of being “in Christ Jesus” and not under “condemnation” is by definition one which is circumscribed (confined within the limits of) by the activity of “putting to death the deeds of the body” and “being led by the Spirit of God”. “No condemnation” applies only to such people whose lives are voluntarily confined according to these limitations and to none besides. They are people who persevere in faith and righteousness.

2. God’s Responsibility—Preservation

We have now exposed one side of the coin—perseverance; it remains to examine the flip side—God’s preservation. Does the believer have any help in his struggles to persevere to the end or is he left to struggle alone? Does he have any assurance that he will be successful in the end? The Apostle Peter gives us the inspired answer to these questions:

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to *obtain* an inheritance *which is* imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, who are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time (1 Pet. 1: 3-5).

In this verse we have first the electing grace of God who “caused us to be born again to a living hope.” Our rebirth is not our doing any more than our first birth was our doing. It is something sovereignly caused by God. The stated purpose of this rebirth is that we obtain “an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for [us]”. Peter piles up description on top of description detailing the permanent status of this inheritance—“imperishable”, “undefiled”, “will not fade away”, “reserved in heaven”. This description does not give us the impression that our inheritance is only a faint hope or wishful thinking, but a solid reality based upon the solid promise of God.

But how do we know that the promise is secure if possession of the promise is contingent upon our perseverance in faith and obedience? How do we know we will not end up like those in Heb. 6, 2 Pet. 2, or Matt. 13? Peter offers us a wonderful transition from perseverance to preservation. God does not make “reservations” for people he knows (omnisciently) will not persevere to the end. Furthermore, he assures that those who are chosen will most certainly persevere. The same

people who have an inheritance reserved for them are **protected by the power of God through faith**. This is the same protection promised by Paul when he says, **But the Lord is faithful, and He will strengthen and protect you from the evil one** (2 Thess. 3: 3).

Notice the balance between perseverance and preservation found in this passage. Those who have an inheritance reserved in heaven and who are protected by the power of God are protected **through faith** or **by means of faith**. The believer's faith is never set aside or suspended on the basis of God's omnipotent power. Rather, his faith is upheld and generated by this power. It is through faith or by means of faith that he is protected, and this faith is not of ourselves but is the gift of God (Eph. 2: 8).

The same divine protection is promised by our Lord Jesus Christ when he declares,

“My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; and I give eternal life to them, and they shall never perish; and no one shall snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given *them* to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch *them* out of the Father's hand.” (Jn. 10: 27-29).

Here, as in 1 Pet. 1, we observe both sides of the coin—perseverance and preservation. The sheep hear Jesus' voice and follow Him. Both **hear** and **follow** are present tense verbs indicating continuous action—they keep on hearing and they keep on following. They never stop hearing, and they never stop following, except for temporary, impermanent lapses of faith or lapses into sin. (We must never forget David, a psalmist and a man after God's own heart (1 Sam. 13: 14), lest we believe we are immune to such a fall (1 Cor. 10: 12). What is the reason for such tenacious hearing and following? What is the reason for their perseverance? The answer is that they are given to Christ by the Father who will never take them away from the Son with whom he is well-pleased, the Son to whom he has given the nations as an inheritance (Ps. 2: 7-8). Furthermore, they are safely enfolded into the hands of the Son and the Father from whom no one, not even the devil himself, can snatch them away. God's protective grace ensures that his sheep will continue to hear his voice and follow him.

In both passages, the terminus or destination of God's protective power is also indicated. Christ said that his sheep would **never** perish, and Peter says that the end point is a **salvation ready to be revealed in the last time**. There is no interruption of protection until we are safely gathered into the eschatological kingdom at the end of time. **For I am confident of this very thing**, declares Paul, **“that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus”** (Phil. 1: 6). The chain of salvation outlined by Paul in Rom. 8: 28-30 is the inspired proof that God never begins a work in us that He does not finish.

And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to *His* purpose. For whom He foreknew, He also predestined *to become* conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the first-born among many brethren; and whom He predestined, these He also called; and whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified.

Of all those foreknown (loved beforehand) by God before the foundation of the world (Eph. 1: 4), the same number are also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son (sanctified). And those who are predestined are also the same who are effectually called through the operations of

the Holy Spirit. And those who are called are also justified and glorified. Not a single soul is lost between foreknowledge in eternity and glorification, the completion of sanctification and the resurrection of the body. This is precisely what our Lord promised us when he said, “**And this is the will of Him who sent Me, that of all that He has given Me I lose nothing, but raise it up on the last day**” (Jn. 6: 39). Christ is not satisfied with 99 of His sheep when He has the power to save all 100 of them. No wonder, then, that Paul boldly exclaimed,

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? Just as it is written, “For thy sake we are being put to death all day long; we were considered as sheep to be slaughtered.” But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord (Rom. 8: 35-39).

H. Glorification

1. Elements of Glorification

Glorification consists of the reconstitution of the body for all believers making it suitable for eternal life in the new heavens and earth. Sanctification begins at the moment of conversion and proceeds gradually throughout a believer’s life but is never complete until the moment of physical death (Heb. 12: 23). At that moment his spirit goes to be with the Lord and is fully conformed to the moral likeness of his Savior, Jesus Christ, in which his renewal to a true knowledge of Christ is complete (Col. 3: 10).

But the completion of sanctification is not the whole picture. Redemption consists not only in the reformation of the soul but the reformation of the body as well. Christianity does not teach the permanent separation of the soul from the body, but the separation of the believer from sin. In justification the believer is saved from the guilt and penalty of sin. In sanctification the believer is saved from the power or dominion of sin. At death he is saved from the very presence of sin. At such a time the desperate cry of Paul and of every true believer in Rom. 7: 24 is realized in this liberation of the spirit from the body which is sometimes a **prisoner to the law of sin which is in [our] members**. At that moment he will join the assembly of God’s people in heaven and the **spirits of righteous men made perfect** (Heb. 12: 23).

To **the body of this death**, we say, “Good riddance!”, but we will not be complete in our new sinless estate until Christ gives us a new body to replace the old one. We are not complete while we remain as a bodiless spirits. For this reason, glorification does not refer to the believer’s passage from life in the body to spiritual life in heaven. This is also a glorious state which we should look forward to (Phil. 1: 23) in which we are absent from the body but present with the Lord (2 Cor. 5: 8), but it is not the terminus (end) of God’s glorious purpose for us. As Murray has put it,

The redemption which Christ has secured for his people is redemption not only from sin but also from all its consequences. Death is the wages of sin and the death of believers does not deliver them from death. The last enemy, death, has not yet been destroyed; it has not yet been swallowed up in victory. Hence glorification has in view the destruction of death itself (*Redemption Accomplished and Applied*, pp. 174-175).

Two passages of scripture together give us a fairly well-rounded picture of the glorification of the believer—Rom. 8: 18-25 and 1 Cor. 15: 20-58. In the first passage, the hope of the believer is grounded in what Paul calls **the revealing of the sons of God** or **the redemption of our body**. Along with this redemption will be the deliverance of the non-rational creation, including the geophysical and animal world, from the ravages of man’s sin—a deliverance which Paul describes as the freedom of creation from its **slavery to corruption**. I believe we are safe to assume that the animal world will be part of the creation freed from the corruption imposed upon it by man (cf. Isa. 11: 6-9). Moreover, if God saw that the non-rational animal world **was good**, it is logically reasonable that He would not deprive Himself of the glory of the animal world in the new creation. In 1 Cor. 15, Paul describes in more detail the redemption of the body briefly mentioned in Rom. 8: 23. We will examine these two passages in order.

2. The Time of Glorification—Romans 8: 18-25

So then, brethren, we are under obligation, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh—¹³ for if you are living according to the flesh, you must die; but if by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live. ¹⁴ For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. ¹⁵ For you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but you have received a spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out, "Abba! Father!" ¹⁶ The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God, ¹⁷ and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with *Him* so that we may also be glorified with *Him*. ¹⁸ For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us. ¹⁹ For the anxious longing of the creation waits eagerly for the revealing of the sons of God. ²⁰ For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it, in hope ²¹ that the creation itself also will be set free from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God. ²² For we know that the whole creation groans and suffers the pains of childbirth together until now. ²³ And not only this, but also we ourselves, having the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting eagerly for *our* adoption as sons, the redemption of our body. ²⁴ For in hope we have been saved, but hope that is seen is not hope; for who hopes for what he *already* sees? ²⁵ But if we hope for what we do not see, with perseverance we wait eagerly for it. (Rom. 8:12-25 NASB)

Four main ideas are presented in this passage: (1) the bondage of creation to man’s sin (vv. 20-21a); (2) the anxious longing of creation for its rebirth and freedom at the revealing of the sons of God (vv. 19, 21b, 22), (3) the anxious longing of Christians for the redemption of their bodies (v. 23), and (4) the perseverance with which Christians must wait for the consummation of this promise (vv. 24-25).

(a) The bondage of creation to man’s sin (vv. 20-21a).

When Adam sinned, he not only brought ruin upon himself and all his descendants but upon the physical creation itself. Notice that creation was subjected to “futility”. What is **futility**? You remember that when Adam fell into sin, the curse placed upon him included the curse upon the ground. God said to him,

“Because you have listened to the voice of your wife, and have eaten from the tree about which I commanded you, saying, ‘You shall not eat from it’; **cursed is the ground because of you**; in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life. Both thorns and thistles it shall grow for you; and you shall eat

the plants of the field; by the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground, because from it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return.”

Notice in this statement that the ground was cursed because of Adam. Adam’s sin is the reason the physical creation, including the ground itself, is cursed. This is the human side of the curse upon the ground. The divine side is that God did it—he cursed the ground. Paul focuses upon God’s activity in *Romans*. He says that the creation was subjected to futility because of the will of God who subjected it to futility. Only God had the power and authority to subject the creation to a curse, and He did so because of man’s sin.

The **creation** mentioned in this verse is the non-rational creation including the animal world and the geophysical world of mountains, streams, and trees. This creation is subjected to futility and vanity **not of its own will** (v. 20). What this means is that the animal world never sinned against God, and neither did the geophysical world. Therefore, Paul must be talking about the non-rational creation which cannot sin or rebel against God. Nevertheless, God himself subjected this non-rational creation to vanity because of man’s sin (cf. *Romans*, John Murray).

The “futility” that Paul is talking about consists in this: something terrible happened to the physical creation at the fall which now prevents creation from functioning as well as it did before the fall. After the fall the ground grew thorns and thistles when it once grew only useful plants. It was no longer as productive as it was before. There were droughts, terrible storms, floods, earthquakes, devastating insects, fires—all kinds of devastation from natural causes which are the curse of a supernatural God who is now judging man’s sin by judging the creation itself.

Included in this judgment is man’s mismanagement of the earth—deforestation, pollution, erosion, waste, and worst of all, wars which devastate the land. I have heard that the Sahara Desert is gaining one linear mile of ground per year—nothing but sand, useless in terms of sustaining life. Considering that a mist once came out of the ground to water the earth, and that a canopy of water once covered the earth, it is doubtful that deserts ever existed before the fall, so even deserts are the result of man’s sin. I am not a proponent of the theory of global warming as if every bad thing happening to the climate is produced by human agency and can be reversed by human agency—an unproven theory used by western politicians to control people, even world governments. However, my denial of this theory does not deny man’s mismanagement of creation and that God has used this mismanagement instrumentally as a secondary cause to accomplish His will of cursing the ground, the primary cause. Some of the effects of the curse are caused directly by God irrespective of secondary causes. For examples, the world-wide flood was most certainly not caused by man nor are tsunamis caused by men.

Not only would man grow old and die; the animal world would also die. Animals would die from age, disease, and from the violence of predators which would hunt them for food. They would die from man’s destruction of animal habitats, although some of this elimination of habitats was inevitable—for example, the building of cities and the clearing of forests for farmland.

The reason the whole creation suffers from so much devastation today is not because creation sinned, but because man sinned; and in response to his rebellion, the God who created the world has subjected the creation to vanity.

The creation has suffered so much from man's sin, and is continuing to suffer so much, that Paul describes its present condition as one of **slavery to corruption** (v. 21). Fallen man is corrupt, and his corruption and judgment are transferred to the physical, non-rational creation in the terrible devastations which I have already mentioned. It is called **slavery** because the creation cannot escape man's corruption.

(b) The anxious longing of creation for its rebirth and freedom at the revealing of the sons of God (vv. 19, 21b, 22)

God subjected the creation to futility, but notice in v. 20 that he subjected it **in hope**. Corruption and futility were not going to be the permanent condition of the physical creation. When God created the world, there was nothing wrong with it, and when he looked at what he had made **He saw that it is good**. Creation is now tarnished by man's sin, but God never had any intention of leaving it in this condition. He subjected it to vanity, but he subjected it **in hope**. In other words, when the creation was dragged into the ruin of man's sin, God always had something else in mind for the future of creation. Furthermore, what He will do for the physical creation is part of the **glory** which will one day be **revealed** to believers—the glory Paul mentions in v. 19. Therefore, the glorification of believers consists, in part, in the renewal of the non-rational creation.

In v. 19 Paul personifies the creation by ascribing to it human emotions and human activity. The creation is anxiously longing for and waiting for the glorification of God's people. The **revealing of the sons of God** in v. 19 is synonymous to the **glory of the children of God** in v. 21.

For the anxious longing of the creation waits eagerly for **the revealing of the sons of God**. (Rom. 8:19 NASB)

that the creation itself also will be set free from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of **the glory of the children of God**. (Rom. 8:21 NASB)

The creation is eagerly anticipating that day when the sons of God will be revealed. On that day the creation will be set free from the slavery to corruption to which God has subjected it. It is now in slavery—a slavery which I have attempted to describe earlier—but when the sons of God (believers) are fully revealed, creation will no longer be in slavery but will be set free. We should notice from the text that **slavery to corruption** is associated with the fall of man, but that the **freedom** of creation is associated with the **revealing of the sons of God**. Thus, it would appear that the creation is waiting to be put under new management or a new owner, like abused slaves whose merciless master has died and who are then placed under a new, merciful owner who grants all of them their freedom. Or, perhaps we can change the metaphor to the idea of regime change. The present creation is under the regime of ungodly kings—fallen men—who have not fulfilled their responsibility as earth-stewards and who will one day be replaced by godly kings—redeemed men and women—who will be kind stewards of the earth rather than greedy despots who merely grab what they want.

The anxious longing of creation is also described by another picture in v. 22—a woman giving birth to a child. In fact, the **anxious longing** of v.19 is connected to the **pains of childbirth** in v. 22. Creation is like a woman having a baby, and it is groaning under the pain of childbirth. My wife tells me that the pain of childbirth is excruciating, and I believe her because I have seen all four of my children being born, and every time one was born Fran would go into these frightful

groans. But when the baby was born, all her groans turned into smiles and sighs of satisfaction. She had just brought a living soul into the world, and this soul was worth all the pain. (For those readers who are following the transgender insanity of the US, be advised that men cannot bear children. God has given this unique and wonderful function only to women.)

Paul says that creation is like that. The creation is groaning under the pains of childbirth; but her groans are not the groans of sorrow, but joy. Creation is painfully but joyfully waiting for a new birth in which she will no longer be subject to drought, floods, storms, fires, pollution, mismanagement, war, and greed. And the animal world will no longer be subject to the disease, violence, and death brought upon it by man's sin. What kind of world will this be? Many OT passages give us hints of a physical world free from the bondage of sin.

Isa. 11: 6-9—And the wolf will dwell with the lamb, and the leopard will lie down with the kid, and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little boy will lead them. Also the cow and the bear will graze; their young will lie down together; and the lion will eat straw like the ox. and the nursing child will play by the hole of the cobra, and the weaned child will put his hand on the viper's den. They will not hurt or destroy in all My holy mountain, for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.

In this passage we discover that in the new, restored earth, there will be harmony between animals and harmony between animals and men. It is a picture of the original creation when God brought all the animals, including predatory animals like lions and leopards, in front of man for him to name. There was no fear of man for animals or animals for man until the fall. In the new earth, we may be able to have leopards for house cats. But animals do not possess an eternal soul or the image of God, so don't count on your dog, Spot, going to heaven. Nevertheless, the original creation which consisted of animals will not be more glorious than the renewed creation without sin. Some extinct species (dinosaurs perhaps?) may even be brought back to life expressly for the purpose of displaying this glory. God created the world **good**, including the animal and plant kingdoms, and He will not be robbed of any of his glory because man wanted to be his own god.

Isa. 35: 4-7—Say to those with anxious heart, "Take courage, fear not. Behold, your God will come *with* vengeance; The recompense of God will come, but He will save you." Then the eyes of the blind will be opened, and the ears of the deaf will be unstopped. Then the lame will leap like a deer, and the tongue of the dumb will shout for joy. for waters will break forth in the wilderness and streams in the Arabah. And the scorched land will become a pool, and the thirsty ground springs of water; in the haunt of jackals, its resting place, grass *becomes* reeds and rushes.

Two effects of the fall are reversed in this passage. First, there will be complete obliteration of all diseases and handicaps. The blind will see. The deaf will hear. The lame will walk. The dumb will speak. Second, the effects of the fall upon the geophysical creation will be reversed. The Arabah, or desert, will sprout streams of water so profusely that the scorched land will become like a pool of water. Where there was nothing but sand, vegetation will once more cover the desert. In the new earth we may expect the multiplication of all kinds of plant life, some of which has become extinct because of the fall.

Such descriptions are not limited to the OT. In the NT we read the following from *Revelation*:

Rev. 21: 2—And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband.

Rev. 22: 1-2—And he showed me a river of the water of life, clear as crystal, coming from the throne of God and of the Lamb, in the middle of its street. And on either side of the river was the tree of life, bearing twelve *kinds of* fruit, yielding its fruit every month; and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations.

The **new Jerusalem** is given explicit description in Rev. 21, a description reminiscent of the Garden of Eden in Gen. 2: 8-15. A river flowed out of Eden (v. 10) which branched into four rivers—a very large geographical area representing the whole earth. As Adam inherited the earth, so shall believers inherit the renewed earth (Matt. 5: 5). In Rev. 22 **a river of the water of life** (cf. John 4: 10; the living water offered to the Samaritan woman) is coming from the throne of God and is flowing through the city, and the **tree of life** (barred to Adam) is now readily available to man on each side of the river. In this city there will no longer be any curse (22: 3). God is clearly taking us back to the garden, but this time it is not just a garden but a garden city representing the whole earth reflecting man's legitimate achievements and dominion over the earth from Adam until the return of Christ. The physical world has been negatively affected by sin. Therefore, the physical creation will be positively affected by the revealing of the sons of God.

(c) **The anxious longing of believers for the redemption of their bodies (v. 23)**

And not only this, but also we ourselves, having the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting eagerly for *our* adoption as sons, the redemption of our body. (Rom. 8:23 NASB)

Not only does the creation groan in childbirth awaiting a new beginning, we also groan within ourselves waiting for our new beginning. Considering the connection of our groaning with the first fruits of Spirit in the same verse, it is likely that our groaning is the direct result of the work of the Spirit within us, producing a holy dissatisfaction for our present condition. Verse 23 says that we are waiting eagerly for our adoption as sons. It is true that believers presently possess the adoption of sons in one sense, for the Spirit of adoption witnesses with our spirit that we are the children of God (7: 15; Gal. 4: 6). Galatians 4: 6 specifically tells us that we **are** sons (present tense), not **will be** sons. Nevertheless, we have not yet received the full benefits of our adoption as sons. This partial installment of our adoption is called the **first fruits** of the Spirit (v. 23). In other places the first fruits of the Spirit is called the **pledge** of the Spirit (2 Cor. 5: 5; Eph. 1: 14).

In the OT the first fruits of the harvest which were given to the Lord signified that the whole harvest belonged to the Lord. The first-born sons of Israel had to be redeemed with animal sacrifices signifying that the whole nation of Israel belonged to the Lord (Ex. 13: 2, 13).

"Sanctify to Me every firstborn, the first offspring of every womb among the sons of Israel, both of man and beast; it belongs to Me." (Exod. 13:2 NASB)

"But every first offspring of a donkey you shall redeem with a lamb, but if you do not redeem *it*, then you shall break its neck; and every firstborn of man among your sons you shall redeem. (Exod. 13:13 NASB)

In the NT, the term **first fruits** is likewise symbolic of ownership, but this time the ownership belongs to the people of God. Christ has been resurrected from the dead as the **first fruits** of believers who have died and who will be raised from the dead.

But now Christ has been raised from the dead, the **first fruits** of those who are asleep. (1 Cor. 15:20 NASB)

Thus, the resurrection of Christ indicates the guarantee of our resurrection. In Rom. 8: 23, the Spirit is given to us as the first fruits of our adoption—a pledge that all the benefits of adoption are coming. This is the meaning given in Eph. 1: 14 where Paul says the Spirit is given to us as the **pledge** of our inheritance. A pledge is a guarantee of future payment.

As believers we have possession of the first fruits of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit is the Spirit of adoption which prompts us to cry out, **Abba, Father**. In other words, the Spirit within us gives us the assurance that we are sons of God who have a share in the inheritance as heirs (8: 17). Paul makes no attempt to describe what the assurance of the Spirit feels like. He simply says that the Spirit witnesses with our human spirit telling us that we are the children of God. You might say this is the still, small voice of God inside of us. By the Spirit we put to death the deeds of the flesh, and we walk by the Spirit in love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. As we walk by the Spirit and are led by the Spirit in the path of obedience, the Spirit witnesses with our spirit that these blessings of adoption are only the beginning—there is much more inheritance to come. There are two parts of this inheritance: (1) the enjoyment of a restored creation, and (2) the **redemption of the body** (v. 23).

(d) Perseverance in waiting (vv. 24-25)

Once again we are told that we must wait for something that we have already in part (vv. 24-25; cf. v 23). We are already redeemed by the blood of Christ, and we are purchased by Christ. But our bodies are not yet redeemed; and even as believers we will one day die, and our earthly bodies will be buried and will rot in the grave until they become dust. But when Christ returns in glory, the bodies of believers who have died before His return will rise from the dead. Paul gives us the details of this event in 1 Thess. 4: 16-17:

For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of *the* archangel, and with the trumpet of God; and the dead in Christ shall rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and thus we shall always be with the Lord.

Believers at death do not enter some kind of “soul sleep” in which they are unconscious in the grave until the return of Christ. Paul would not have been excited about departing this life had he believed that he was entering an indefinite period of sleep. Instead, he said, **But I am hard-pressed from both directions, having the desire to depart and be with Christ, for that is very much better; yet to remain on in the flesh is more necessary for your sake** (Phil.1: 23-24). For Paul, **to be absent from the body** meant to be **at home with the Lord** (2 Cor. 5: 8).

At death we go immediately and spiritually to heaven to be with the Lord (Lk. 23: 43), but our bodies stay behind in the grave to decay and return to dust—the grand finale of man’s ill-conceived experiment to be his own god. As in Adam all die (1 Cor. 15: 22), and our faith in Christ will not prevent this death unless we are still alive at the second coming of Christ (1Thess. 4: 15). Our bodies will rise from the grave only at his return, but our spirits will enjoy the benefits of fellowship with Christ before his return. Paul comforts the believers in Corinth with the prospects of being with Christ even immediately after our **earthly tent** (a metaphor for the impermanence of the

earthly body) is **torn down** (2 Cor. 5: 1). When that happens, Christians **have a building from God, a house made with hands eternal in the heavens**. The verb **have** is present tense which appears to imply that we have this new body immediately upon the disintegration of the earthly tent, but this would contradict other passages (1 Thess. 4: 13-18 and 1 Cor. 15: 50-57) which clearly teach that the dead bodies (not spirits) of Christians “sleep” before the return of Christ. There would be no resurrection of dead bodies at the return of Christ if believers received them at death. The present tense of **have** in 2 Cor. 5: 1 is simply the reflection of Paul’s absolute certainty of this future event (Ladd, p. 553).

But there is a certain degree of holy dissatisfaction in Paul concerning the prospects of a bodiless existence, even a bodiless existence in heaven before the return of Christ. Paul was a Jew and not a Greek, and he was not persuaded by the Greek “ideal” of being liberated from the body to live in a purely spiritual state—a false theology plaguing the church throughout Achaia and Macedonia and continuing to plague the modern church. God created man both body and soul, and this was **very good**. Thus the prospect of living without his body was not all appealing to Paul as much as he looked forward to being with Christ (5: 6-9; Phil. 1: 23). He describes this bodiless existence in 2 Cor. 5:3 as being “naked”, a description which clearly has a negative connotation. Consequently, we have no information from Paul about the intermediate state between the death of the individual believer and the glorification of all believers at the return of Christ—nothing that goes beyond what Christ told the thief on the cross, **“Today, you will be with me in paradise.”** Therefore, Paul looks beyond the intermediate state to our glorified state which commences at the resurrection of the dead at the return of Christ (Knox Chamblin, *Paul and the Self*, p. 247; George Eldon Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament*, pp. 552-554, footnoted in Chamblin, p. 247).

3. The Resurrection of the Body—1 Cor. 15

But what kind of bodies will we have at the resurrection? Obviously, Paul was not excited at the prospect of a rotting corpse or a bag of dust at the return of Christ. And perhaps this false conclusion is what he responded to—with a certain amount of displeasure (!)—in 1 Cor. 15: 36, **You fool! That which you sow does not come to life unless it dies**. In 1 Cor. 15, we learn that the bodies we now possess on earth are not suited to our existence in the new creation. Notice what Paul says in vv. 20-58 of that chapter.

In v. 20, Paul is not implying soul sleep. Those who are asleep are believers who have died. Sleep is a euphemism (a nice way of saying something) for the believer’s death. He does not use the word “death” since death is not the final estate of the believer, not even for his body (1 Thess. 4: 15; 1 Cor. 11: 30). Thus, he says that the bodies of believers, not their spirits, are **asleep**. Again he uses the words, **first fruits** (v. 20), and applies this to the resurrected Christ who is the guarantee of the believer’s resurrection. We are born first **in Adam**” and because of this unity with Adam as our federal head we will **all die** (v. 22), but we are now in union with Christ as our new federal head, a union which includes his resurrection (Rom. 6: 3-5). All who are in union with Christ **will be made alive**. (Paul is not a Universalist who believes that all people irrespective of faith will be made alive.)

Each will be resurrected **in his own order** or in the proper order. Christ has already been resurrected, but the believer’s body will be resurrected at his second coming (v. 23). Paul goes into some detail here about the second coming and Christ’s handing over of the kingdom to God the Father (vv. 28), but this is not pertinent (necessary to our present discussion. It may be

necessary to explain why Paul is so exercised in spirit that he would respond in such a way (v. 36) to the question posed in v. 35. It is obvious from vv. 31-32, but especially from 15: 12-19, that there were some at Corinth who were questioning the possibility of the resurrection. But if there were no resurrection, the gospel wasn't true (vv. 13-14, 17); and it was pure folly for Paul or anyone else to suffer for the sake of a religion which offers no benefits beyond the grave (v. 32a). As a matter of fact, if there is no resurrection, then Christ himself has not been raised from the dead, and we are still unforgiven (vv. 13-17). Without the resurrection, therefore, it is better not to be a Christian at all; we might as well live it up the best we can and simply die like animals (v. 32b). Furthermore, as Christians who have denied themselves many creaturely pleasures—which, if there is no resurrection, are the only important things in life—we are most to be pitied if there is no resurrection from the dead (v. 19).

Paul, who had essentially given up his life for the gospel—including the right to marry—was understandably upset at the heresy circulating in Corinth to the effect that there was no bodily resurrection. What's more, this teaching had been an encouragement for licentious (immoral) living among professing believers at Corinth (vv. 33-34). Immoral behavior is the logical step for one who has no hope of life after death—"You only go around once in life, so grab for all the gusto [money, sex, alcohol, drugs, etc.] you can get." Nevertheless, Paul was not being sarcastic or bitter, for on other occasions Christ used the same reproach for unbelief (Matt. 23: 17; Lk. 12: 20; 24: 25-26; cf. Charles Hodge, *1 and 2 Corinthians*, p. 343). Nevertheless, he knew where such thinking led, and he was adamant about stamping it out.

A grain of wheat which is never planted does not come to life. Only when it is planted in the ground and dies does it come to life (Jn. 12: 24), but not as the original grain of wheat but as the full-grown plant (1 Cor. 15: 36-38). The disorganization of the material matter in the grain is the necessary condition for the reorganization of the genetic material in the ground (Hodge, p. 343). Likewise, the human body is sown into the ground in dishonor (v. 43) at death as a **perishable** body, but it is reorganized and raised as an **imperishable** body. It was once a **natural** body, but now it will be a **spiritual** body (vv. 42-44). This **spiritual body** is not to be confused as a body with no material substance, but is

a body animated and dominated by the Spirit (*Pneuma*) of God (Rom. 8: 10-11; 1 Cor. 15: 44). The former marks one's solidarity with Adam, the latter one's incorporation into the last Adam and participation in the new humanity inaugurated at his resurrection from the dead (1 Cor. 15: 20-23, 45-49)....

One respect in which Christ's people shall be conformed to his image (15: 49) is to receive a resurrection body like his: "Our citizenship is in heaven, and from there we eagerly await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform the body of our lowliness that it may become like the body of his glory" (Phil. 3: 20-21).... (Knox Chamblin, *Paul and the Self*, p. 246).

There is, says Chamblin, continuity in this resurrection body of believers.

Just as the risen Christ was the very Christ who had died (1 Cor. 15: 3-8), so too the Christian does not become another person but the same person in a transformed and glorified state. Paul likens the experience not to replacing one garment by another, but to putting one garment over another: "the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality" (p. 247).

When Christ wanted it to be, his resurrected body was fully recognizable (Lk. 24: 31, 38-39; Matt. 28: 1-9, 16-17). This implies that the resurrected body of believers will also be recognizable to those who knew them on earth. Consequently, we will be gloriously reunited to departed loved ones in the new earth, and we will become acquainted with the saints who lived in ages past and those who will live after us. We need not be worried about those who have been cremated—burned to ashes—or those who lost their lives in violent explosions, etc. The promise is that the dead in Christ will be raised from the dead no matter how they died or where their graves may be. Even if their ashes have been blown to the wind, their bodies will be raised as recognizable bodies. Besides, if enough time passes between our physical death and our resurrection, our bodies will have already decomposed into dust, giving those who were buried no advantage over those who died in war or were lost at sea.

In the same way, the restored creation will not be totally new, but renewed. There was nothing wrong with the creation when God made it, and there is no reason to “start from scratch” by making creation ex nihilo—from nothing. Much of the present earth will be readily recognizable in the new earth. Peter’s statement about the **earth and its works** being **burned up** do not necessarily mean the total annihilation of the earth, but rather, purification and reorganization—as with the human body which will be recognizable to others after glorification (cf. Lk. 24: 41; Jn. 20: 25-29). Jesus appeared to His disciples in a recognizable, glorified body; otherwise, His appearances to them as proof of His resurrection would have been meaningless. Likewise, the new earth will not be totally new, but reorganized and restored—part of the restoration of all things in Christ (Acts 3: 21).

But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, in which the heavens will pass away with a roar and **the elements will be destroyed with intense heat, and the earth and its works will be burned up**.¹¹ Since all these things are to be destroyed in this way, what sort of people ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness,¹² looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be destroyed by burning, and the elements will melt with intense heat!¹³ But according to His promise we are looking for **new heavens and a new earth**, in which righteousness dwells. (2 Pet. 3:10-13 NASB)

As I said earlier, the destruction of the earth by fire probably implies purification, not annihilation. The earth as it was created was **good**, but it was subjected to the futility of man’s sin. Freed from the curse and the debilitating effects of man’s corruption, the earth will once more perfectly reflect the glory of God—no pollution, erosion, life-threatening storms or droughts. In the same way, the flood did not annihilate the earth but “washed” it from the impurity of a corrupt human population **filled with violence** (Gen. 6: 11) leaving only God’s chosen family. Moreover, the phrase, **the earth and its works will be burned up**, implies the sinful works of man, not the works of believers who will be rewarded at the last judgment nor even the works of unbelievers done according to the standards of God’s law. The technological progress of the last two centuries—much of it accomplished through the scientific efforts of unbelievers—has cured the world of systemic poverty and disease; and I don’t think the new heavens and earth will revert to the agricultural setting of the garden of Eden. It is described in Revelation as the garden city of the New Jerusalem.

And the city has no need of the sun or of the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God has illumined it, and its lamp *is* the Lamb.²⁴ The nations will walk by its light, and **the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it**.²⁵ In the daytime (for there will be no night there) its gates will never be closed;²⁶ and **they will bring the glory and the honor of the nations into it**;²⁷ and nothing unclean, and no one

who practices abomination and lying, shall ever come into it, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life. (Rev. 21:23-27 NASB)

That which represents **the glory and the honor** of various cultures will be brought into the **new Jerusalem** (Rev. 21: 2; a synecdoche—a part representing the whole) representing the whole earth, the garden city inclusive of man's legitimate accomplishments. All truth is God's truth; therefore, man's legitimate achievements throughout history, derived from the mind of God, will not be wasted but will be preserved for the future. Particularly, our labor in the Lord is **not in vain** (1 Cor. 15: 58). However, if all our accomplishments were burned up, our labor would be in vain. The analogy of faith (scripture interpreting scripture) indicates that if our labor fails the test of God's judgment, it will be consumed with fire (1 Cor. 3: 12-15), but if it passes the test, we will receive our reward for labor that will stand forever.

The human body was also **very good** from its creation, and there is no need for God to use more dust by starting over. He will simply reconstitute it to make it **imperishable** and suitable for eternity. I'm inclined to believe that our present bodies have only a small percentage of the physical capability they will have at glorification. We have some hint of this fact in the amazing stories of people who have performed superhuman feats of strength when the emergency demanded it—like a woman pulling an automobile off her son when the jack fell. Scientists tell us that these feats are possible because of higher than ordinary levels of epinephrine—the “fight or flight” hormone being let into the bloodstream—levels triggered by an emergency. (And can we forget Samson?) We will be able to climb Mount Everest without the risk and without the oxygen mask. Our mental capabilities will also be enhanced. Scientists today tell us that a typical human uses only a small percentage of his brain. How intelligent would we be if we could use 100% of it?

Not only is the natural body perishable because of sin, it may very well have been unsuited to eternal life before sin. Commenting on 1 Cor. 15: 45 Hodge notes:

It is evident from the entire history, that Adam was formed for an existence on this earth, and therefore with a body adapted to the present state of being; in its essential attributes not differing from those which we have inherited from him. He was indeed created immortal. Had he not sinned he would not have been subject to death. For death is the wages of sin. And as Paul elsewhere teaches, death is by sin. From what the apostle, however, here says of the contrast between Adam and Christ; of the earthly and perishable nature of the former as opposed to the immortal, spiritual nature of the latter, it is plain that Adam as originally created was not, as to his body, in that state which would fit him for his immortal existence. After his period of probation was passed, it is to be inferred, that a change in him would have taken place, analogous to that which is to take place in those believers who shall be alive when Christ comes. They shall not die, but they shall be changed. Of this change in the constitution of the body, the tree of life was probably constituted the sacrament. For when he sinned he was excluded from the garden of Eden, “lest he put forth his hand and take of the tree of life, and eat, and live forever,” Gen. 3, 22. Some change therefore, was to take place in his body, to adapt it to live for ever (Charles Hodge, *1 and 2 Corinthians*, p. 349, emphasis mine).

The change which Paul mentions in vv. 51-52 is a change which occurs on the day of Christ's return. The language of v. 52 is very similar to that used by Paul in 1 Thess. 4: 16. At that moment, all of us, dead or still alive, will be changed; for whether alive or dead **flesh and blood** [*i.e. the normal human body*] **cannot inherit the kingdom of God** (v. 50). It needs radical reorganization

for a timeless existence. Some Christians will still be alive on that day (v. 51), and what a day it will be! But they will have no advantage over those who are **asleep** or dead, because Paul says,

For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep.¹⁶ For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of *the* archangel and with the trumpet of God, **and the dead in Christ will rise first.**¹⁷ **Then we who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air,** and so we shall always be with the Lord. (1 Thess. 4:15-17 NASB)

The change which all believers undergo at the return of Christ is a change we all go through together as the body of Christ.

4. The Saints Glorified Together

Murray makes an important note of the fact that the glorification of believers is not the individualistic event which the death of every believer must be (*Redemption*, pp. 175-177). Each believer dies alone and stands before God apart from every other believer at death, but also with Christ standing beside him as his advocate. But we will all go through glorification together—from godly Abel, who was murdered by his brother, to the very last Christian standing when Christ returns. This collective glorification is quite in keeping with what God has been doing all along. All believers were chosen in Christ together before the foundation of the world (Eph. 1: 4), and all believers are being collectively **fitted together...into a holy temple in the Lord; in whom [we] are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit** (Eph. 2: 21-22). The building will not be complete until the last brick is laid. All Christians are also growing up together into a **mature man** in Christ (Eph. 4: 13). It is fitting, therefore, that all believers who are chosen together in Christ before the beginning of the world would be **made perfect together** (Heb. 11: 40) at the end of the world as we know it.

5. The Glorification of Christ in His Saints

The glorification of the saints in a restored creation is first and foremost the consummation of the glorification of Jesus Christ (Murray, p. 177). Christ has loved his church and given himself for her...

so that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of the water with the word, that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she should be holy and blameless (Eph. 5: 26-27).

If death is the grand finale (the final exhibition) of man's ill-conceived plan to be his own god, then glorification is the grand finale of the Father's plan to save sinners, of Christ's execution of that plan on the cross, and of the Spirit's application of that plan in the hearts of His people. For this reason, as in everything else, our eyes must be fixed on Jesus Christ of whom the Father says, **Listen to him** (Matt. 17: 5) and on Christ whom the Spirit glorifies (Jn. 16: 14) **who for the joy set before Him [namely, his church] endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God** (Heb. 12: 2).

The revealing of the sons of God is the revealing of the glory of God in His sons. The present lives of believers are now **hidden** from themselves and from the world—**hidden with Christ in God**

(Col. 3: 3). But when Christ, **who is our life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory** (3: 4). Thus, the revealing of the sons of God is also the revealing of the glory of Christ, whose glory is fully exhibited on earth in his glorified church.

To whom shall we be revealed? First to Christ who purchased us with his blood; then to ourselves to whom **it has not appeared as yet what we shall be but We know that, when He appears, we shall be like Him, because we shall see Him just as He is** (1 Jn. 3: 2). Then we shall be revealed to the world of sinners and skeptics—those whom we will judge (1 Cor. 6: 2)—who throughout their history have been saying, **Where is the promise of His coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all continues just as it was from the beginning of creation** (2 Pet. 3: 4). Lastly, we will be introduced to the restored creation which will breathe a “grand symphony of sighs” (Murray, *Romans*, quoting Philippi, p. 305) in its emancipation from the bondage of corruption to its new-found liberty in the stewardship of sinless man.

6. Our Proper Response to the Doctrine of Glorification

Considering the glory which shall be revealed to us, what kind of people should we be now? Unregenerate sinners are grabbing for everything they can squeeze out of this life, but the Christian must realize that this life is only a brief passage to the next life in the restored creation which will be enjoyed with a glorified body. Therefore, it should be of no concern to the believer that he may not enjoy everything that God has to offer in this life. There are far more blessings to enjoy beginning at the return of Christ in glory. The kingdom we should be seeking is the kingdom of Christ and not our personal kingdoms of ease, luxury, and power which, like our sufferings, are not worthy to be compared to the glory which will one day be revealed.