

# *Systematic Theology: The Doctrine of Salvation*

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## ***Soteriology—The Doctrine of Salvation***

### ***I. Introduction***

One may wonder why we need a separate study of the doctrine of salvation. After all, this is what we have been talking about all along in our study of Systematic Theology. Yet, the ways of God in saving His people need clarification so that we may better understand the working of the Holy Spirit (Pneumatology—also a separate topic for Systematic Theology) and the order of events involved in our salvation. In the accomplishment of redemption, all of 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. 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 of 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 recreation in Christ (redemption) is not in the least sense inferior to the majesty and splendor of the creation of the world and is the end-goal to which the physical creation points (Rom. 8: 18-25). 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 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. To cast it aside nonchalantly (casually) as unimportant is to slight the Author of

redemption. 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” (p. 80).

### **A. *John 3: 3-8***

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***

In this verse, being born of God is the necessary precondition of being delivered from the power of sin (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.

### **C. *John 1: 12***

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 *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 the adoption of the individual 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***

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 these texts 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: 30***

Three separate acts of the application of redemption are mentioned in this passage—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 (See also v. 29). 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 heaven. 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. And 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. There can be no distinction between the two without doing violence to the text.

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 (have reason) to believe that all the steps are comprehended (included) 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, which is the comprehensive (including all the parts) goal and completion of God’s purpose in sanctification. In glorification, the sanctifying process which begins at justification will be brought to completion, and the Christian will perfectly reflect the moral image of Jesus Christ without defect.

We learn from this text that 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 other way around). 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 this particular individual and will not be frustrated. When God starts building, He never has to stop due to lack of funds or ability (Phil 1: 6). Throughout our lives on earth, He will be continuing this building and improving it, and it will never be completed in this life. But when we die and go to be with the Lord in heaven, He will put His finishing touches on it, and it will be perfect and glorified. 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).

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 waver (go back and forth) from the logical order which he has begun in the passage. Calling comes before justification.

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

The Biblical record testifies that "we are justified by faith, from faith, through faith, and upon faith." It should be noted that the word "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. If justification comes before faith, then Paul should say that faith comes through or by justification and not that justification is by faith.

Another reason Murray gives for putting faith before justification is that calling comes before justification (per Rom. 8: 30). This calling is the divine call of God to the sinner by means of the Holy Spirit through which He woos and persuades the sinner to come to Him in faith. (More about calling will come later in our discussion). Faith is the response of the sinner to this calling. Although it 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 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 this scheme? 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 inclosed 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, having 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 at war. 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). Indeed, 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. 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 completely glorified (entirely sanctified). 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, permeates (spreads through) the entire order of salvation from regeneration to glorification. It is so important that we will spend considerable time on the subject later.

*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 (cf. p. 324).

### ***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 (Matt. 22: 14), but are not convinced of their sin or of their need for salvation. The gospel is preached to millions each year, many of them who are members of evangelical churches, upon whom it has no positive effect, only the negative effect of hardening those who hear it (2 Cor. 2: 15-16; Rom. 9: 17-18). Pharaoh heard the OT message of the gospel from Moses, who pleaded with him to submit to Yahweh and let the people of Israel worship Him. He hardened his own heart to this plea, and God hardened his heart further. One can never hear the gospel without it having an impact upon his life. The gospel is the Word of God, and God has said that His word will always accomplish His intentions—whether life or death (Isa. 55: 11). In this sense, even the universal call of God is “effectual”—it is effectual for the hardening of the heart for those who reject it (See also 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.’” 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, why bother to include it in the unbroken chain of redemption?

Returning to the traditional view, in the universal call of the gospel, the gospel is preached to all men and women because Christ has told us to do so (Lk. 24: 46-47) regardless of the response. The responsibility of being successful in this endeavor is not ours, but belongs to God. Our responsibility is simply to explain the message of the gospel as clearly and accurately as we can and leave the results up 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 (2 Cor. 2: 17) as if the gospel were for sale. 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 of the preacher and a discouragement to church members who truly know Jesus Christ.

### ***2. Effective unto Salvation because the Work of God***

Effectual call, then, 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 effectual implications of this text. Those who are drawn by the Father are the same who will be raised up on the last day. This is also the same class of people who are given to the Son by the Father, who will most definitely come to the Son for salvation, and whom Christ will certainly not cast out (Jn. 6: 37). We don't 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: 1 Cor. 1: 9; 2 Tim. 1: 8-9; Rom. 8: 30; Gal. 1: 15-16; Eph. 1: 17-18). In all of these passages, the person of Christ is easily distinguished from the person of the Father, and effectual calling is clearly the work of the Father. It should go without saying, then, that 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 goes against the natural disposition of man, who sees in himself all that is essential to respond to the saving work of Christ if he wishes. We are prone to think that while it was necessary for God to accomplish the work of redemption, His work is unnecessary at the point of application. For God to work in our favor in spite of us (even against our natural disposition) appears to many people to be a violation of the "free" will of man, and we feel slighted at this intrusion. Murray's analysis of this objection is poignant (sharp and penetrating).

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 [in the sin of Adam and Eve who wished to think independently of God] (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 does not 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 the summons is heard, we irresistibly heed this summons with our whole heart, mind, will, and emotions. Through the call of God, Christ becomes irresistible to us.

Perhaps an illustration from common life will help at this point. Suppose a man meets a woman at work. After weeks of working with this woman, he is not particularly pleased with her personality, and her looks are unimpressive. Somehow, they make an emotional connection with one another when they discover some mutual interests. Pretty soon, 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 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 are to 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 they are 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 to later 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 indifferent to it? Still others hear it and seem to believe it for a while, but drift back into their old way of life. What makes the difference? The difference is not in the gospel 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.

### ***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, since God, in their view, 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. And the same number who are given to the Son are also drawn to the Son by the Father. 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 every ear. There are millions in our day who go to their graves without ever hearing the gospel message. These are judged according to the standards implied in Romans 1: 18-32, but they are not judged because they rejected the gospel call.

The question 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*. We have already covered total depravity under the heading of “Anthropology” (See your notes in Systematic Theology, pp. 140-141), but it may be helpful to review some of the information here. One of the best summaries of total depravity in the OT is found in Genesis

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6: 5 just before the flood, “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.” This statement sounds 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 thought he did.

The Apostle Paul reinforced the fact of man’s deficiency from several quotations from the Psalms and Isaiah in Romans 3: 10-18, one of which says, “There is none who does good.” 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.

This is what Jesus implies in his conversation with Nicodemus in John 3:6-7 when he says, “That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, ‘You must be born again.’” The flesh can produce nothing but flesh; it cannot produce the fruits of the Spirit which include repentance, faith, and goodness. There is little doubt that Paul had this conversation in mind when he was writing Romans 8.

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. He 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. Indeed, if the unbeliever (in the flesh) is able to do such things, what need is there of regeneration since there is nothing to regenerate? 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 carefully 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. I will not attempt to resolve an issue which is best left to keener minds. Perhaps it will help by saying that 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.

Since such human analogies inevitably fail, it is probably best to stick to Scripture in understanding the miracle of regeneration.

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

The classical text dealing with regeneration is Jesus’ conversation with Nicodemus found in John 3. We dealt with this passage only briefly, so we will now give it more detailed attention (See Murray, pp. 95-105).

When Jesus says that unless one is born again he will not “see” the kingdom of God, the reference is obviously 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. To improve on the analogy a little, a dog could look at the same masterpieces, but receive no aesthetic gratification (satisfaction) at all. To the dog, the work of art would be just an object in front of him with images resembling things familiar to him. The kingdom of God is like this to most people—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, which is why 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 the matter simply because we can’t. We do not decide who our father will be or who our mother will be. We do not decide when we will be

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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.

So it is with the new birth. We are totally passive in the matter. We do not decide when and how the Holy Spirit will act, the point Jesus makes in v. 8. The “wind” (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, not depending at all on our participation and not under our control, a fact which is often ignored in modern evangelistic methods which seek to manipulate people into an emotional state “more promising” of repentance and faith. Forty-five stanzas of “Just As I Am” or repetitive singing of popular choruses will not obligate 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.

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”. By saying this, He immediately put Nicodemus on the “hot seat” (defensive). Moses commanded the Israelites to circumcise their hearts (Dt. 10: 16). They were not able to do so, of course, but they were *responsible* to do so nevertheless. Regeneration does not occur apart from means, but through the means of the gospel proclamation (James 1: 18; 1 Pet. 1: 23-25). There must be something which a man hears in the gospel message which the Spirit uses in the regenerative process. It is *mediated* through the means of the word and Spirit, and does not take place *immediately* apart from the word and the Spirit (See Krabbendam, pp. 126-127, who takes issue with the views of Abraham Kuyper and B. B. Warfield).

Many questions have arisen about being “born of water and the Spirit.” Being born of the Spirit is fairly obvious. But what is the meaning of being born of water. Several explanations have been offered.

**1. Born of water means 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 is very unlikely for the following reasons. 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 (being God) 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.” 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).

2. The reference to water is a reference 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.

Murray has the best refutation (argument against) of this view (*Redemption Accomplished and Applied*, p.97). Jesus does not say “born of baptism” but “born of water”, and we have no justification from the context of the passage in assuming the meaning of 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 which would be familiar to Nicodemus and which would serve best in conveying (giving) to him a profound spiritual truth. Therefore, when He used the word, “water”, He used a figure of speech which communicated a clear spiritual principle for Nicodemus, a Pharisee and an expert in the OT, and one familiar with the prophecy of Ezekiel. And this spiritual principle was the same principle which water represented in the OT, namely, purification. Entrance into the presence of God in the OT temple required ritual cleansing or purification; entrance into the kingdom of God requires 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 which blinded him to his own moral pollution and need for cleansing. “Born of water” in John 3 means purification from the defilement of sin and not water baptism.

This interpretation appears to agree most closely with Ezekiel 36: 25-26 which Murray believes is the OT parallel of John 3. Both passages present two aspects of the new birth—cleansing and recreation of life. “Born of water” and “born of the Spirit” correspond to the sprinkling of “clean water” and the putting of a “new Spirit” within which are found in the Ezekiel passage. As a Pharisee, Nicodemus would have been familiar with this promise in Ezekiel, and, therefore, Jesus rightly questions his confusion about the necessity of the new birth, “Are you a teacher of Israel, and do not understand these things” (Jn. 3: 10)? The change which Jesus says is 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, p.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, Titus 3: 5. In that passage, there is a very clear reference to the spiritual cleansing and renewal which we have seen in John 3 and Ezek. 36. “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.” 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 can take place only through the operation of the Spirit.

Another passage, 1 Pet. 3: 21, has often been pressed into service to support baptismal regeneration. Peter says that “corresponding to” the salvation of Noah and his family in the ark, baptism saves us. This passage requires a lengthy explanation, but 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”. 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.) 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 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 graces of God *before* His baptism, but this grace finds outward expression in baptism. (This explanation, of course, does not address the issue of infant baptism, something which Peter does not have in view in this passage.)

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). What could be clearer than that Peter is not saying that water baptism actually saves a person. 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.

### ***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 regenerate 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 (without exception) is attended by the other saving graces of God. The Bible knows nothing of regeneration without repentance and faith or without deliverance from the power of sin.

John tells us that "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). To this verse we may add 1 Jn. 5: 4, "For whatever is born of God overcomes the world and this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith" and 5: 18, "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." When these verses are considered together, we come to the conclusion 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 which accompany regeneration (being "born of God") as anything other than conversion (repentance and faith) and sanctification. It is, therefore, impossible to experience regeneration without also being converted.

Regeneration is at the basis of all change in heart and life. It is a stupendous [astonishing] 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 [unbeatable] 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).

## ***C. Repentance and Faith (Conversion)***

### ***1. Repentance***

The Westminster Shorter Catechism defines repentance as follows:

Repentance unto life is a saving grace, whereby a sinner, out of a true sense of his sin, and apprehension [awareness] of the mercy of God in Christ, doth [does], with grief and hatred of his sin, turn from it unto God, with full purpose of, and endeavor after, new obedience.

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 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. We see from this passage that 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 reveals the same meaning when the Jews repented specifically for their sin of rejecting Jesus their Messiah and crucifying Him on a cross. 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. His 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 of this man, “Today, salvation has come to this house, because he, too, is a son of Abraham.” When many of the Ephesians were converted, they gathered together their magic books totalling 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; see also 1 Thess. 1: 9). The individual which Paul delivered over to Satan in 1 Cor. 5 repented of his sin of incest with his stepmother (2 Cor. 2).

#### ***(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 in light of the fact that 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 Dvostevsky, “Without God, everything is permissible.” That is, without God, there are no moral absolutes and no right and wrong—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 uses the same reasoning 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.

### **(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 (See Isa. 6). One of the biggest deficiencies of modern-day evangelism is that many people are being “saved” on their personal thrones. This is where we believe that we belong, because the very root of our sin is that we all aspire to the sin of Adam and Eve—to become our own gods. Many people are convinced through modern evangelism that it is not necessary to leave their thrones in order to follow Jesus Christ. They may remain the self-serving, self-worshipping people that they have always been, but now they have the additional insurance that Jesus is their Savior just in case they need him later. It’s all so simple.

But it is not as simple as they suppose, because repentance involves a total reevaluation of who we are as people. In repentance we repudiate [reject] our presumed status as gods walking on earth and recognize that there is only one God who has the rightful claim upon our lives. He and he alone has the right to govern us and prescribe the way we should go. This new perspective is vividly illustrated to us in Jesus’ parable of the Pharisee and the publican in 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. It is important to note that Jesus makes it clear that although the Pharisee

believed he was praying to God, he was really praying only “to himself” (v. 11), and not to God at all. God does not hear such prayers, because there is no repentance in them. By way of contrast, Jesus tells of the prayers of the tax-collector who was pleading with God, not from his throne of self-justification, but in the dust of humility and repentance saying, “God, be merciful to me, *the* sinner!” Notice that he said, “*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. (As many in our day would casually admit, “Of course I’m *a* sinner, so is everyone else!) He was *the* sinner who stood condemned before God on account of his wicked and rebellious heart, and now he stood alone and naked before the judge of the universe who had the power and the right to deal with him as He pleased. He did not think of himself as surrounded by a host of other sinners who were worse than himself—the fallacy of the Pharisee. He was *the* sinner.

His was the same attitude as the Apostle Paul’s who said, “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). Paul’s statement is a fascinating study in itself of the ongoing self-evaluation of the true child of God. His first letter to Timothy is written toward the end of his life, 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; he had been in danger of starvation, freezing to death, and in danger of thieves (2 Cor. 11: 23-28). Yet after all of his efforts and sacrifices as an apostle, his estimation of himself at the end of his life was actually lower than it was when he began his ministry. In the space of eight to ten years of suffering, his self-evaluation had gone from being the “least of the apostles” to the “least of the saints [Christians]” to “the foremost of all sinners.”

There is a lesson to be learned in repentance from Paul’s testimony. Repentance is not a once for all event which may be conveniently dispensed with so that the Christian can move up to higher, mountain-top experiences. It is the very fabric of the Christian life moment by moment as we continually acknowledge wrong actions and wrong motives. It is the continuation of the fruit of regeneration and sanctification in the Christian’s life which he will never “outgrow” until the moment of his glorification in heaven at which time he will be made perfect and have no need of repentance.

#### **(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 is the error of the nation of the Jews, who trusted in their own merits and not those of Christ. Paul laments this error in Romans 10: 2-5 by saying, “For I bear them [his Jewish countrymen] witness that they have a zeal for God, but not in accordance with knowledge. For not knowing about God’s righteousness, and seeking to establish their own [righteousness], they

did not subject themselves to the righteousness of God. For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes. For Moses writes that the man who practices the righteousness which is based on law shall live by that righteousness.” 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. If he tells man to jump ten feet high, but the best of us can only manage three feet, then God figures three feet is the best he can expect and accepts that. 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 to pass, and if you fail to jump ten feet, you also fail. The righteousness of God which is 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 on the earth 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 (in comparison 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 compared to other people, but to God Himself.

In contrast to this is the righteousness of God imputed to (given to) the sinner by grace through faith in Jesus Christ. It is the 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 which 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.

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).

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. Sinners suffering from the consequences of their sins are sorry, but they are not sorry for having offended God. Further, different personalities who come to repentance will express godly sorrow in different ways which cannot be infallibly measured by anyone but God (See also *Collected Writings of John Murray*, Vol. 2, pp. 260-261). 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.

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.) 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 just as easily 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’s helpful summary on pp. 133-134, *Christian Doctrine*.)

### **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 believes that God is one and that Jesus is the Son of God (James 2: 19; Matt. 8: 29; Lk. 4: 34).

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 (worthy of merit) in our faith which is a gift from God (Eph. 2: 8-9). It is merely the empty vessel with which we reach out to receive the gift of salvation.

### ***b. What Faith Is***

Faith is knowledge and assent, but more than that, it is trust. (Krabbendam adds the element of appropriation, “eating the body and drinking the blood of Christ” according to John 6: 25ff.)

#### ***(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 content when he says, “So faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ” (Rom. 10: 17), and earlier in the chapter when he says, “How shall they call upon Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher” (v. 14)? The gospel must have content, and this content must be communicated clearly and accurately.

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). 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....(p. 47, emphasis his).

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 (p. 48).

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" (Machen, 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 is "forced" to believe it. This is not to say he is externally forced into belief, but that he is internally compelled to believe it by the overwhelming evidence of Scripture. To the unaided mind, the Scriptures are incomprehensible, not due to any fault in themselves but because the natural mind cannot perceive their truthfulness and is at enmity (war) with the God who inspired them (See 1 Cor. 2: 14; Rom. 8: 7). But aided by the Spirit through regenerating grace which produces repentance and faith, 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 adequacy 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 to his faith, but if this contrary 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. This is faith in faith, and there is no need for objective verification (analysis of the evidence) of the truth outside the person.

In contrast, the faith of Christianity is based on facts, compelling facts outside the person, facts which are objective (independent of the person) and not subjective (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 the space of 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 does not simply give us moral principles, but tells us that our life both now and in the future depends on the fact of His death and resurrection and our union with Him in this death and resurrection (Romans 6; Gal. 2: 20).

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: “and if Christ has not been raised, your faith is worthless; you are still in your sins” (1 Cor. 15: 17). The objective facts outside of the person are essential to his 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).

This is the kind of faith mentioned in Heb. 11: 1, “Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.” The Greek word for “assurance” is *hypostasis* which many translations have rendered “substance” or “essence.” 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” which is how the same word is used in Heb. 3: 14, and is the favorite translation of most modern commentators (Philip E. Hughes, *Hebrews*, p.439)

But 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’s work in us producing a conviction of sin and a filial spirit which cries out, “Abba, Father,” (Rom. 8: 15) is 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. There are many truths that do not affect us in this way. We know that Lake Victoria is one of the largest fresh water lakes 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 solution, 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 redolent (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) in 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 did know had gripped her heart and caused her to reach out to Jesus in the most desperate way she knew. 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 Thes. 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.

**(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 have said above, 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 in 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 came to the conclusion 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, he, the thief, deserved what he was getting. 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—at least in this life. He could not get down off the cross, and in a few hours he would be dead and unable to do anything which might be remotely acceptable to God. 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 Nazereth 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 to please God and earn our salvation. The thief could do nothing in the future, and neither can we. 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) just goes to show us that faith the size of a mustard seed can apprehend (lay hold of) 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. Could this be 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 merits, merits by which they could earn recognition in heaven, merits 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.

Romans 5: 5. 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 (administered to us) by the agency of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit constantly reminds us of God’s love for us on the basis of 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.

Romans 8: 16. This verse conveys the same thought of Rom. 5: 5 with a little different shade of meaning. 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 which is the reason many expositors (John Murray included; see Romans) interpret the spirit in Rom. 8: 16 not as a human disposition but as the Holy Spirit.

Romans 8: 38-39. 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.

1 John 3: 14. One’s love for other Christians is a good indicator of true faith. John also tells us that this love comes to expression in acts of love and not just empty words (3: 17-18).

1 John 3: 4-10. This passage gives us assurance on the basis of a changed life. If a person no longer practices sin as a way of life, he can be assured that the Holy Spirit is doing a work of grace in his heart. Once again, part of the practice of righteousness includes love of other believers.

Ps. 139: 23-24. 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).

1 John 5: 13. 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).

Assurance of faith may be cultivated (improved) 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. 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 on a daily basis. 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).

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. Scripture makes it clear that there are many who believe they are saved but are lost (Matt. 7: 21-23). 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: 38-39, in which Paul assures his readers that nothing can separate them from the love of God simply because God is the one who justifies them in opposition to all accusations against them (8: 33). We will now turn to the next step in the order of salvation, justification.

## ***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? How can God declare the sinner to be just or righteous in His sight?

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.

Four verses of Scripture 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).

Prov. 17: 15. 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.

Luke 7: 29. The tax-gatherers and the people “justified God.” Obviously they did not make God upright or righteous, something God already was without any help. It simply means they declared God to be righteous or just.

Luke 10: 29. 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 in regard to the law commanding us to love our neighbor as ourselves.

Luke 16: 15. 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.

The declarative nature of justification is also indicated in verses which contrast *justification* with *condemnation* (Rom. 5: 16; 8: 33-34). When God condemns the sinner, He does not make him wicked; he was already wicked when God condemned him. In the same way, when God justifies, He declares the person to be what he already is—righteous. Further, the context of Rom. 8: 33-34 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 passages 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. So 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 in 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” in 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 in spite of 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, *dikaioo*). 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. In the words of Murray, “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 righteous, but He actually establishes the fact of his innocence and righteousness in the act of justification. In this way, God is not lying 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 sinner is, in actual fact, not innocent and righteous with respect to the law of God. The declaration is not a sham, 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).

Romans 5: 19. The word translated “made” in the *New American Standard Bible* and the *New King James Version* 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 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 status of guilt (unrighteousness). In Christ, the status of many was changed from guilt to innocence (righteousness).

Romans 5: 17. 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.

Romans 4: 3-5, 22-24; Gal. 3: 6; 2 Cor. 5: 19. Through believing (faith), righteousness is credited to our account; that is, in the eyes of God, we are considered (reckoned; from the Greek word *logizetai*) 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 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 in order that “we might become the righteousness of God in Him.”

The additional action, then, which 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 in which God called into being something which did not exist previously. After calling 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 we have 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.

Because faith is the instrument of justification, it can also be said that 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....For this reason it is *by faith, that it might be in accordance with grace*, in order that the promise may be certain to all the descendants, not only to those who are of the Law [the Jews], but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all....(Romans 4: 14, 16) Justification *by works* and justification *by faith* are exact opposites. Justification by works or by law is according to personal merit and is the just payment for one’s self-righteousness (Rom. 4: 4). No one can be justified on this basis because personal righteousness is always inadequate and imperfect (Gal. 2: 16). But justification by faith is based on the righteousness of another, Jesus Christ, and is not the payment for our own personal righteousness, but the provision of Christ’s righteousness which we receive by believing in His merits.

Justification by works and by grace cannot go together (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 accepted by God. Our merit is impure and unacceptable because it is not a perfect righteousness. To present it to God along

with the perfect righteousness of Christ as the basis of our justification would be like presenting a king with a glass of water defiled with cow manure. (And we should not be surprised if God is offended by our offer.) Being justified by faith alone, we do not need to offer anything to God but our faith in Jesus, and to offer anything else would be an abomination in God's sight.

### ***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 might increase?” In other words, the presence of sin in our lives and the forgiveness of those sins demonstrate the grace of God. The more we sin and the more God forgives, the more gracious He is proven to be. But this theory distorts the end to which justification is directed. We are justified in order to be sanctified, and it is a necessary step before the process of sanctification begins. We are declared righteous (and constituted 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 (Eph. 1: 4). We are saved *from* our sin, not *in* it. Any teaching which marginalizes (considers unimportant) good works or sanctification in the redemptive process distorts the doctrine of justification by faith. As Luther noted carefully, we are not saved by faith *and* works, but by a faith *that* works. “Faith without works is useless” (James 2: 20).

It is the clear teaching of Scripture that the final judgment will be according to works (Matt. 25: 31-46; 2 Cor. 5: 10). This is not a contradiction of justification by faith alone, but recognition 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 (See Matt. 5: 12, 46; 10: 41-42; Lk. 6: 35; 1 Cor. 3: 8, 14; 9: 17; 2 Tim. 4: 7). These verses are not talking about justification or salvation. Justification and salvation are by grace through faith and have no reference to what a person has done on earth. They are talking about extra rewards given on the basis of works, and while it is only by grace that the rewards are given, the measure of the reward will be on the basis of good works. “That is to say it is a reward of grace” (Murray, *Collected Writings*, vol. 2, p. 221).

Casual reflection upon this truth will reveal its wisdom. Are we to suppose that a serial murderer will receive the same punishment in hell as another who was charitable to others and a good family man? And will not the Apostle Paul receive a much greater reward than other Christians who were timid and hesitant in their labor for the Lord, and perhaps lazy? Will Christians who died for their faith not receive a greater reward than those who chose to play it safe? The answers seem obvious.

### ***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 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 repent. Lack of persistent repentance 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 16<sup>th</sup> century, the history of the Church and the world has changed dramatically. Of this doctrine Luther wrote, “When the article of justification has fallen, everything has fallen.” He also said, “This is the chief article from which all other doctrines have flowed,” and that this doctrine is “the master and prince, the lord, the ruler, and the judge over all kinds of doctrines” (James Montgomery Boice, *Foundations of the Christian Faith*, p. 416, quoting from Luther, *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*).

Commenting on these quotations, Boice says, “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?” (*Foundations of the Christian Faith*, p. 416). John Murray, one of the foremost Reformed theologians of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, concurs (agrees) with this assessment in the following comment (*Collected Writings*, vol. 2, p. 203, emphasis mine.)

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*.

## ***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 he 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 as His children. The implication (that which is implied) 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 [our] heart may be enlightened, so that [we] 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), and 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 inadvertently (accidentally). But the new name for God is Father. This is the name Jesus told His disciples to use when they asked Him how to pray, “Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.” The name of God is still to 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; God *is* a consuming fire, not *was* a consuming fire). Nevertheless, there are differences between the administration of the OC (Old Covenant) and the NC (New Covenant). If this were not so, it would not have received the distinction of being *new*. We have discussed some of these distinctions before (See your notes on ST under “Man in Covenant Relationship with God.”) We will not repeat all of those distinctions here, but a few points deserve special attention.

Recall the events in Ex. 19: 10-25 when the OC law (the covenant documents) was given to the nation of Israel shortly after the exodus from Egypt. 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 near. Even they would not be exempt from a sure and sudden death if they came too close to this awesome and holy God (19: 12-13).

The context of the giving of the covenant in Exodus 19-20 is contrasted with the circumstances of the NC (Heb. 12: 18-24). Notice in v. 18 that Christians “have not come” to the situation which prevailed at the giving of the law. Notice also the strong adversative “but” (alla in the Greek) in v. 22. “*But* you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to myriads of angels...” 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; see also 10: 19-22). This confidence is far removed from the warnings in Exodus not to touch the mountain where God was giving the Law.

As Packer has noted in *Knowing God*, “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” (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 base 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. Packer insists that adoption, properly understood, governs our lives as Christians in a number of ways (*Knowing God*, pp.190-193).

### ***a. Adoption governs our conduct***

The kind of conduct emphasized in the Sermon on the Mount is the kind which is encouraged by parents to 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 to. 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 (*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 (Matt. 5: 16). 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.

#### ***(3) Pleasing the Father***

Children in God's family must be focused on pleasing the Father rather than pleasing men (Matt. 6: 1-18). 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? Is the reason to build our own reputation with men? If so, our earthly reputation will be the full extent of our reward.

If what we do is to please the Father, our reward awaits us in heaven, for nothing we do to please our Father will go unnoticed.

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” which is given to the Christian. 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 on the basis of our status. 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 for sin, and a true son will 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.” There is nothing formal (proper according to custom) 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 at all times as small children who generally don’t behave according to formality, but spontaneously (impulsively). With the heavenly Father, we need no appointments to enter his presence. It should be our impulse to spontaneously seek his help for all of our needs.

Our spontaneity (impulse according to the moment) can best be illustrated with a story of Abraham Lincoln, one of the most remembered presidents of the United States. As president of the United States, 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. He is remembered to walk boldly into a meeting of world leaders, crawl up into Lincoln’s lap and say, “Daddy, would you please tie my shoes?” President Lincoln would then excuse himself for a couple of minutes and tie his son’s shoes. This familiarity with his father is the kind of familiarity we should have with God or 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, in order 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 whim (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 *actually* 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 being true of Christ, 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. No matter what, God always gives us what we need.

### *c. Adoption governs the life of faith*

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus teaches us not to be anxious about our lives (Matt. 6: 25-34). 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 (controlled) by the earnest desire to see His kingdom and righteousness manifested in our personal lives and the personal lives of everyone else. This is what we should be seeking for, and if this is our priority, everything else will fall into place. This does not mean that we will no longer have to work or pay school fees for our children’s education, 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 to put food on the table, but to do the father’s will by obeying his commands. One of our Father’s commands, a big one, is to make disciples of all nations, teaching them also to obey His commandments as we do (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.

It is hard to estimate how far behind the Church is in obeying our Lord’s command to make disciples of all nations simply because of this anxious care for food, clothing, and shelter. And for wealthy nations, it is not just a desire for basic necessities, but for total economic security. For the most part, American Christians do not wish to leave anything to faith, preferring to walk by sight, a reversal of the Pauline principle of 2 Cor. 5: 7. Today in the US, the prayer of most Christians has ceased to be “Give us this day our daily bread” but has become, “Give us this day our retirement income by which we can live the last twenty years of our lives in unproductive idleness.” It is ironic that people will work forty years in the expectation of living half that amount of time doing nothing in particular. In order to purchase this last twenty years of retirement, even Christians will refrain from a God-oriented, sacrificial life-style. They will store up for themselves treasures on earth (Matt. 6: 19) and forfeit the treasures in heaven stored up for those who give sacrificially to the needy and to the cause of missions world-wide. They are like the rich fool in Luke 12: 16-21 who prepares assiduously (with diligent attention) for retirement (v. 19), but is not rich toward God (v. 21).

If God takes care of birds (Matt. 6: 19), He will also take care of us. He is not the Father of birds, but of His people who are called His children. These words of assurance in Matthew (See also Luke 12: 22-34) are meant for people who either are or surely will be tempted in times of insecurity 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 given 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). 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. It must be admitted that Acts 17: 28-29 lends itself to this idea, but upon further examination, the passage cannot bear the weight of this interpretation. It is true that all of mankind is the offspring of God in the creative sense of the word. 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 the right relationship to God as a 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 can hardly be said of those who are alienated from God and are children of wrath, not of God (Eph. 2: 3).

In Matt. 5: 45-48, although God is shown to be good to all men, He is called the Father only of the disciples. 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 which context is the body of Christ. Malachi 2: 10, as Acts 17: 28-29, 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, “Why do we deal treacherously each against his *brother* so as to profane the *covenant* of our fathers?”

In His controversy with the Pharisees, Jesus once and for all denied the existence of the fatherhood of God for all men without exception (Jn. 8: 39-44). 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. It goes without saying that 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. Quoted in Murray, *Collected Writings*, Vol. 2, pp. 225).

It may be pointed out that God was the Father of Israel and 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, and to resolve it, we must establish a fundamental difference in the adoption of Israel as a nation and the adoption of individuals subsequent to (after) their justification. Remember Rom. 5: 1 which 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 by which we have received the Spirit (the Holy Spirit) of adoption by which we cry out, “Abba, Father.” It 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 on the basis of 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 on the basis of bad behavior. If this were true, He would be less generous than a human father who adopts a child only later to cast him out of the house. God is not less gracious than a human father, but far more gracious.

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). This same passage, Rom. 11, warns the Gentiles in the Church of Rome that the same thing will happen to them if they do not continue in belief. They should not boast in the fact that they as Gentiles were grafted as 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 passages 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. His own remarks are helpful in marking out this distinction (*Collected Writings*, vol. 2, p.225-226).

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 prepadeutic [preparatory teaching], the New is gradulatory [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.

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 as the tutelage of the Holy Spirit (See Gal. 5: 16-26). It is precisely this tutelage of the Spirit which confirms our adoption and the permanent benefits of adoption (Eph. 1: 13-14). 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 Christ's Community Study Center—Mbarara, Uganda—mcneildf@gmail.com—July, 2012

Covenant is likened to an heir coming of age and taking ownership of his father's property (Gal. 4: 1-7).

We must also recognize the difference between *national* adoption and *individual* adoption. Israel was adopted as a nation, but not every Israelite was individually adopted (Rom. 2: 28-29; 9: 6-8). Notice in Rom. 9: 8 that the fleshly descendents of Israel were *not 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 rescinded (taken away). They are merely warnings to make sure that we truly are the adopted children of God and do not falsely presume we are adopted as the Jews did (Jn 8: 39-44). If we are truly adopted children, we will believe in Christ, and we will desire to do the deeds of our Father, the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ. 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. Rather, our unbelief and disobedience proves that we are still rebels who are at war with God.

### ***F. Sanctification***

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 activities of God which are not repeated and which do not include the participation of the sinner, 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 throughout his life until this operation is completed in death. Another difference is that progressive sanctification *includes*, indeed *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 [note: work *out*, not work *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 a weighty verse in the understanding of progressive sanctification and one we will return to later for more detailed analysis. It is sufficient to say at this point that God, through the agency of the Holy Spirit, is working in us to desire and to do His will. The believer, though active and responsible in the process of sanctification, is nevertheless, never alone in the process.

The student will notice that we have been talking about "progressive sanctification," that which takes place in us as a gradual process. What is often missing in our understanding of sanctification is "definitive sanctification" which, like justification, is another once-and-for-all activity of God, not a process but a non-repeatable event. This sounds confusing. Is sanctification a process or is it a non-repeatable activity? The answer is: both. And what we will find is that non-repeatable, definitive sanctification is the foundation upon which progressive sanctification is built and without which it would never occur in the believer's life. Possibly

more than any other theologian, John Murray has helped us understand the difference between progressive and definitive sanctification, and His *Collected Writings*, vol. 2, pp.217-304, will be used liberally to explain the difference.

### *1. Definitive Sanctification*

The Apostle Paul tells the Corinthian believers that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God. “Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals, nor thieves, nor the covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, shall inherit the kingdom of God. And 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: 9a-11). In verse 11, sanctification is listed along with the washing of regeneration (See Titus 3: 5) and with justification as a once-and-for-all act which has already occurred. The tense of “sanctified” is the same as that of “washed” and “justified,” the aorist passive. In the Greek, the aorist tense signifies activity which has occurred as a simple, definitive act in the past (not a continuous activity in the past as indicated by the imperfect tense nor a continuous activity in the present as in the present indicative tense). Further, 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 regeneration, justification, and sanctification, all of which occurred in past time as definitive actions by someone else, God, and not by the Corinthians themselves.

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 in light of the many spiritual and moral problems in the church of Corinth! 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 word, “holy” or “holiness”, has 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 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 (in the order listed). 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 separated (objectively as a matter of fact) from the world unto God in order to make Him known to the rest of the world. In order to do this, we must also develop the ethical character (subjectively) which is distinguished from the world, but it is this 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 (proved 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 or separated from the world) to fulfill our purpose of glorifying God. We presently have (not *will* 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 (or experiential 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?” The question is a logical one. 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. But Paul rejects this reasoning with an emphatic negative, “God forbid!” 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 indicating 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 alone we have become united with Christ and made partakers of the benefits of His death and resurrection? This is not his point. Baptism is symbolic of the union with Christ which is brought into existence only through personal faith in Christ. Baptism does not *cause* this union; it merely *expresses* the union which already exists. (In the case of infant baptism, baptism expresses the hope that the promises of the covenant will be savingly applied to the infant child in time—not automatically through baptism or apart from saving faith, but by means of saving faith. In the case of infant children dying in infancy, we trust as covenant parents that God has supernaturally brought the child into union with Christ in a way not explained to us in Scripture, but nevertheless implied in the covenant relationship. [See Acts 2: 39]).

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). Christ is not now dying gradually. He already died to sin definitively (finally) 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 Chp. 5 Paul says that “death reigned” through sin (vv. 12-14). The reign of death over Christ was due to the penalty of sin which Christ vicariously assumed on the cross. The mastery of death over Christ was due to the mastery of sin over Christ—not His own sin, but the sins of the whole world imputed to Him. 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 death, Christ was no longer subject to death ever again because he no longer lived under the reign and rule of sin which had dominion over Him because of our sin. Again we must remember that Christ’s subjection to the reign and rule of sin was vicarious (representative) or substitutionary. He never sinned, but He Himself became sin for us (2 Cor. 5: 21) and suffered the dominion of sin (death) 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 is now dead (See *Collected Writings*, p.279). He no longer operates or lives in that sphere where sin reigns through death; He is freed (v. 7) from that sphere. Christ will never again live on earth as He once did, under the Law and subject to the curse of the Law because of our sin. 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 and death which no longer 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, and we are not Christians.

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 as 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 (at the same time). 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.

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 looms large in his consciousness (See John Murray, *Principles of Conduct*, pp. 209-218).

Colossians 3: 9 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). 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 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 be an absurdity.) It may be argued that Ephesians 4: 22 implies the responsibility of the Christian to lay aside the old man. This would seem to indicate that the old

man is still alive to be put aside. Murray offers a thorough refutation of this interpretation in the above reference, but a very brief summary of a portion of his argument will be given here. **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 man given in vv. 17-19 cannot fit the description of the new man in Christ. **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. 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.

But 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. 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 reiteration (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. 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.") we repeat 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 (careful) 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 certainly will be lost. Warnings are designed to keep this from happening, and they are a means of grace. The exhortation to “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 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 has to be continually reminded not to act as a slave but as a free man. Though free, in many ways he still thinks like a slave. When he meets his former master in the market place, 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 have to constantly remind themselves not to act like “slaves” of sin, but those who have been freed from its bondage. But our behavior must be rooted in truth, not in “make-believe” 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 make the team unbeatable. This is precisely what knowledge of the truth does for the Christian. Knowing that Satan cannot ultimately and finally defeat him, he has all the

incentive he needs to keep on winning in his fight against sin. The battle must still be fought, but the war is already won in Christ Jesus.

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 perfectly 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. My opinion is that Paul is speaking as a believer who is keenly and painfully aware of the remaining corruptions of his flesh.

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, emphasis his). Murray’s note about Paul’s “*statistical history*” is given only incidentally at the end of his excellent exegesis of this section of *Romans*; but this, I believe, is part of the confusion which has plagued expositors interpreting 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 in light of Paul’s extraordinary sensitivity to his own imperfection compared to his desired goal of absolute perfection (Phil. 3: 10-14). Any personal want of conformity to the law of God was, to Paul, a serious matter, much contrasted to the flippant (careless) attitude of many professing Christians who are often nonchalant (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).

That Paul is not describing himself as a person under sin's dominion is borne out in Rom. 8, and only a brief comparison of 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 (desires) 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).

...there can be no question but "the inward man" of verse 22 refers to what Paul was in his inmost spirit, in the centre 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). [Murray, however, 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 he 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, the pronoun "those" is opposed to the "we" who "know that the law is spiritual" in 7: 14 and the "us, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit" in v. 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

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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 appears obvious 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 "wishing" 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).

This brings us to the conclusion that sin continues to frustrate the believer who has been definitively sanctified by the blood of Jesus Christ. There is, therefore, the necessity for every believer to grow in the grace and the knowledge of Christ to the end that he may more and more imitate Christ in all his perfections. And 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. Paul's constant urging to this end is 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 Thes. 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 *Hebrews* should not be necessary.

It cannot be argued that Paul is only talking to the 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?

***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).

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. 3: 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. And 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 was 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 him 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 magnanimity (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). We could multiply many examples of this strategy (Rom. 13: 14; 15: 2-7; 1 Cor. 11: 1; Gal. 6: 2, 14; Eph. 5: 25).

This focus has led many to believe that we no longer need the law of the OT but only Christ. But this contention is misleading. What is it about Christ to which Paul draws our attention in the above texts? Is it not his moral perfection and character? 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 demonstrated who 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 (Matt. 5: 17-18). 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 (unless adultery and murder are now permissible; cf. my notes on "The Continuity of the Moral Law of the Old Covenant", *Systematic Theology, Vol. 2, 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", *Systematic Theology, Vol. 2*). 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 reiterated (repeated) throughout the NT excepting the Jewish components of sacrifices and ceremonies which are clearly fulfilled in the non-repeatable sacrifice and the continuing priesthood of Christ (*Hebrews*, 1 Cor. 9: 21). In the new covenant we have not merely the letters engraved in stones, but the person of Christ who demonstrates perfect obedience to the law.

No attempt is being made here to deal with the problems of sorting out how the OT case laws contained in Ex. 21-24 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). Rather, I am simply maintaining the continuity of God's holiness asserted throughout the Scriptures—a holiness which is exemplified and confirmed in the person of Jesus Christ (“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 required of every person (Lev. 19: 2; Matt. 5: 48, “Therefore, you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect”, interpreted within the context of Christ's exposition of the moral law on the Sermon on the Mount).

Yet, we must be warned against the legal obedience of the Pharisees (cf. Krabbendam, p. 140). Obedience without love is only partial obedience which is 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 (Gal. 5: 22-23). Thus, the substance of sanctification is not just obedience to the law, but the fruit of the Spirit (Krabbendam, p. 150).

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 (also the fruit of the Spirit) 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 listed in *Galatians*, many of which pertain to relationships within the body of Christ (p. 425). The fruit of the Spirit (“peace, patience, kindness, goodness...gentleness) will guard against “enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, envying” (vv. 20b-21a), while a legal spirit of law-keeping will actually 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 man (Eph. 4: 11-15; 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 it was for Paul (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.

### ***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 formula is found in Phil. 2: 12-13, “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; for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for *His* good pleasure.” John Murray is quick to point 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 Thes. 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 of “lead” (*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 perceptively 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.

We will now take a look at both the necessity of the Spirit and the Spirit’s use of the means of grace in the process of sanctification.

### ***(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, can not 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 exuberant (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 glorification. We will never in this life be able to leave Rom. 7 behind, as much as the Keswick movement (a perfectionist movement descending from John Wesley) 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 his vain efforts 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!” (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. 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 (lessen) 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 next life.

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.” People don't like the word “rational” because it has the negative connotation (meaning) of rationalist philosophy which would reduce everything acceptable in the Bible and the Christian faith to the lowest common denominator of what “makes sense” to the human mind. The virgin birth and resurrection of Christ are not “rational” (at least to the mind unaided by the Holy Spirit) and therefore should be discarded as ancient myths propagated (promoted) by Christ's disciples. But rationalist philosophy aside, the Christian faith is very rational, the most rational truth ever taught and the only explanation for sinful, degraded men being transformed into godly people who are concerned for others (cf. the story of the slave trader, John Newton).

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 doubtless 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 old adage (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, *let your mind dwell [think or logizomai] on these things*” (Phil 4: 8).

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, to 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—“And God saw all that he had made, and behold, it was very good.”

Any efforts at progressive sanctification apart from the study and meditation (thoughtful reflection) 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. How then can we expect any moral transformation by the Holy Spirit when we continually grieve him by ignoring his word? And why must we expect him to honor us with direct revelation and promptings from him to our spirits when we dishonor him by marginalizing his word to the dusty bookshelf? As Packer has noted in *Keeping in Step with the Spirit*, 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” (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 physically. A Christian grows by his dependence upon the word, without which he will not grow “spiritually” or “rationally”. As Murray has observed, “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 absolutely indispensable part of this process. 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 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 2000 years of Christian scholarship preserved in the writings of departed Church fathers and theologians of past generations. 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: “Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death?” (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 (cf. discussion above). Prayer, at its very foundation, is an admission that we cannot live this Christian life on our own power. We may try, and we do try many times apart from continual prayer for assistance, but our trying is losing (cf. Martin Luther’s “A Mighty Fortress”, second stanza). “Apart from me,” Jesus said, “you can do nothing” (Jn. 15: 5). Is this not 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. If one cares to dispute his justified condition in Rom. 7, he is the same Paul who, “filled with the Holy Spirit”, 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”. There is no firm evidence that Paul and Barnabas ever did ministry together again unless we are willing to make this inference from 1 Cor. 9: 6.

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 (cf. your notes above on “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: 6)), but we are commanded to *be filled* with the Holy Spirit (Eph. 5: 18). 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. (And it goes without saying that 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 “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.

As Krabbendam has noted from Rom. 7: 25, there is no permanent turning of the corner from “Wretched man that I am!” to the complete deliverance from sin in the here and now (see above). 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 Thes. 5: 17). “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, 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).

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. 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 serves 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 in the multitudes.

The upshot of the whole argument is this: ***(a) Each one 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 one 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 lowly 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 of function of 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. We could *see* what a monstrosity we were. 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 let someone begin to peel your fingernail off with a pair of pliers and all of a sudden that fingernail is very, very important to you. Jesus said the very hairs of our head are numbered (Matt. 10: 30). Over the past 35 years the hairs of my head have been easier to number every year. My hair was far more useful to me than I previously imagined. When I was doing construction work, I never had any hair on top of my head to warn me that my head was too close to a floor joist or some other object overhead. I would go home at the end of the day with all kind of creases, knots, and scabs from hitting my head on stuff, sometimes several times a day on the same spot. And now I can't stay in the equatorial Ugandan sun more than 15 minutes or so before I need a cap. I miss my hair, and I look forward to the restoration of all things in Christ, including my hair.

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. I am conscious of the fact that I have little hair when I get out in the sun, but there are other important functions going on internally which I am not aware of. My heart is pumping, red blood cells are taking oxygen and nutrients to different parts of the body, the liver is detoxifying my blood, and the digestive tract is breaking down the food I ate and making it usable for the body. But on a daily basis I'm not consciously thankful for these functions.

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 at worst, dead. The body of Christ is the same way. We need all of 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*;

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), but they are important whether we recognize their importance or not.

Everyone knows that a church can't function properly without teaching and preaching gifts. But what if the teaching and preaching aren't being applied by the congregation on a day to day basis? That kind of negates the benefit of preaching, doesn't it? Where would the church be without serving, special acts of charity, mercy, and administration—all of which are listed as gifts of the Spirit. (And I don't believe the gifts listed in 1 Cor. 12, Rom. 12, Eph. 4 and 1 Pet. 4 are intended to be exhaustive.) Can the church thrive without any of these gifts or without any of the people who have these gifts?

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 relegate the importance of many gifts of the Spirit to the realm of the optional. And here I am not speaking of tongues or prophecy or the controversial gifts, but the ordinary gifts of serving, helping, administration, mercy, etc. And it appears obvious from the text that these ordinary gifts are the ones Paul is emphasizing because those in Corinth who had the gift of tongues had no trouble recognizing the significance of their gifts. In fact they appeared to be discounting the ordinary gifts. "They may be nice to have," they thought, "but we can get along well enough without them. We can keep the machinery going with a few cogs broken off. After all, taking meals to old people who are shut up in their houses has little to do with the business of public worship, so we don't need such gifts."

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. Well, all of these are necessary, and they are fine and good as far as they go, but they don't go far enough. Thousands of Anabaptists were hounded to death by reformers who disagreed with them about baptism; and Calvin, Luther, and Zwingli didn't show much charity to one another over the Lord's Supper.

But Jesus didn't say much about the Lord's Supper, baptism, or church discipline—not to imply that they weren't important. But he did talk a lot about truth, and His conception of truth was not comprehended in a system of doctrine having all the i's dotted and all the t's crossed. His idea of truth was the truth realized in practical living. And this leads me to my point that one essential mark of a true church is love—love lived out and realized within 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 expressed within the body of Christ and to unbelievers—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 bed-ridden saint who prays constantly for the rest of the congregation; the administrative type who keeps the books balanced and helps the church use funds wisely; the wise counselor who has no professional degree but one who has studied her Bible and human nature for many years, knows how to analyze people's 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. And 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. 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. "Not so," says Paul. "You can't run on your own spiritual steam. The Christian life was not meant to be lived in isolation from one another. You may not think you need other believers and the manifestation of the Spirit in them, but you do. Even those members which seem weaker are necessary to your spiritual well-being.

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 unpresentable 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 lentils 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. The Lord's Supper is, therefore, a means of grace because it reminds us of God's peace with us—peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ (Rom. 5: 1). 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 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", who have heard the word of God and "immediately [received] 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 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 in the midst of 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 must be “pursued” 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

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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 they will most certainly persevere. The same people who have an inheritance reserved for them are “protected by the power of God”. 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 Thes. 3: 3). Can we believe that those can be lost who are under God’s protection? If this is the case, then such protection is meaningless.

But 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. And 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 two major components: the ***completion of sanctification*** and the ***resurrection of the body***. Sanctification begins at the moment of conversion and proceeds gradually throughout a believer’s life but is never complete until the moment of death. 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”: “Who will set me free from the body of this death?” 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. Glorification is not complete as long as we remain as a bodiless spirit. 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 glorification. 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. In the second passage Paul describes in more detail the redemption of the body only mentioned in Rom. 8: 23. We will examine these two passages in order.

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

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 descendents, 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. This is why 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 the fact 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.)

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 other animals which would hunt them for food. They would die from man's mismanagement of the earth.

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 is 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 said, "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," Paul says, "is anxiously longing for and waiting for the revealing of the sons of God." The "revealing of the sons of God" in v. 19 is synonymous to the "glory of the children of God" in v. 21. 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 an ungodly king—fallen man—who will one day be replaced by a godly king—redeemed man—who will be a kind steward of the earth rather than a greedy despot who is merely grabbing what he wants.

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—pain I know nothing about. 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 as if she were dying. (Please excuse my male perspective, ladies). 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 and more.

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 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 fating 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 animal or animal for man until the fall. In the new earth, we may be able to have leopards for house cats. This is not to be interpreted to mean that animals living before the return of Christ will die and go to heaven. They do not possess an eternal soul or the image of God, so don’t count on your dog, Spot, going to heaven. I am just saying that the original creation which consisted of animals cannot be more glorious than the renewed creation without sin. Some extinct species may 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) 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 which reflects man’s legitimate achievements and dominion over the earth until the return of Christ.

We cannot completely *spiritualize* the meaning of these passages by treating them as only symbols unless we wish to spiritualize the devastation brought upon the physical creation by sin. The physical world has, as a matter of fact, been *negatively affected* by sin. Paul says so in Rom. 8, and this is the way we should interpret the physical devastation of creation all around us. Therefore, it is also a fact that 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)*

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 sanctified dissatisfaction of 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). 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 Christians

who have died and who will be raised from the dead (1 Cor. 15: 20). Thus, the resurrection of Christ indicates the guarantee of our resurrection. In v. 23 of this chapter, the Spirit is given to us as the first fruits of our adoption—a pledge that more of 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 only a guarantee that there is more to come; it is not the whole thing. It is only the down-payment signifying that the whole inheritance belongs to us and is forthcoming.

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 and that God loves us as his own children. As children, we 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 Thes. 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.

We should be careful about jumping to wrong conclusions from this passage. Believers at death do not enter some kind of “soul sleep” in which they are unconscious in the grave until the return of Christ. I don’t think Paul would 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); it did not mean taking a long nap or spending time watching our bodies decaying—with eyes which are also decaying!

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 (1Thes. 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 Thes. 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, therefore, 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 which plagued the church throughout Achaia and Macedonia and which continues 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 because for Paul, death is not the final estate of the believer, not even for his body (1 Thes. 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”, and applies the designation 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 die, 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 while living 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. And, 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 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 (vv. 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. (Personally I look forward to spending some time with John Calvin and John Murray, two of my favorite theologians, as well as Adoniram Judson and William Carey, two of the first missionaries sent to Asia—but only after I get acquainted with Abraham and Moses. 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 rise 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.)

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. For this reason, I’m not at all interested in climbing Mount Everest now, even if I was able. Why take the risk? I’m convinced it will still be around in the new earth when I can climb it later without as much effort and without the oxygen mask. I’d also like to take up parachuting and hang-gliding at the same time—again, without the risks. Likewise, the human body was “very good” from its creation, and there is no need for God to use more dust by starting over. He will simply reorganize 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. Scientists tell us that these feats are possible because of higher than ordinary levels of epinephrine being let into the bloodstream—levels triggered by an emergency. And can we forget Samson? 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).

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 Thes. 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 "remodeling" 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 in 1 Thes. 4: 15-17, "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, *shall not precede those who have fallen asleep*. 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." 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 "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.

And 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 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.

